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COLLECTOR'S EDITION

WORLD WAR II 1939-1945

Bloody city battles

Both Stalin and Hitler were desperate to win in Stalingrad – no matter the cost

The Battle of Britain

Spitfire pilots inflicted decisive defeat on the Luftwaffe

Colossal tank battle

The Battle of Kursk settled the war on the Eastern Front

Hitler turned on Stalin

German blitzkrieg swept aside the Red Army and penetrated deep inside the Soviet Union

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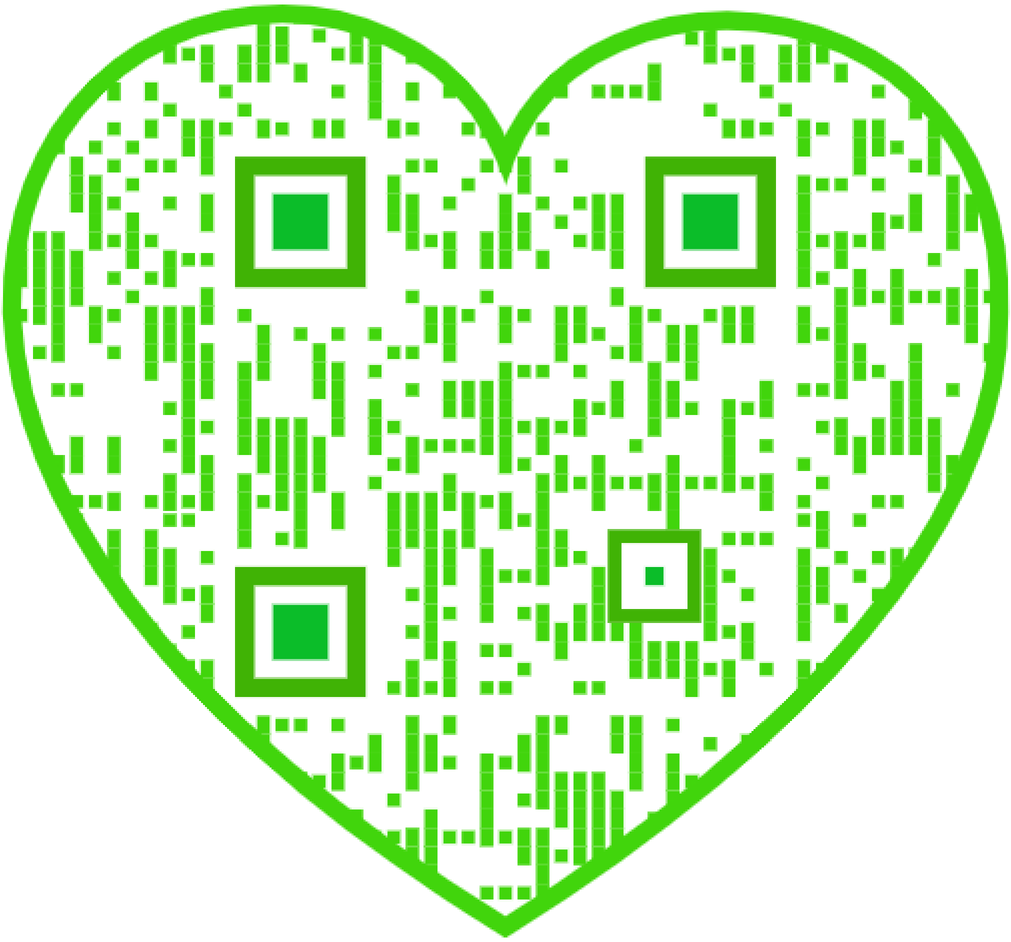
WEAPONS • COMBATANTS • BATTLES



The largest invasion in history

With his surprise attack on the Soviet Union on 22nd June 1941, Adolf Hitler opens a brand new front, the longest in history. 3.7 million soldiers advance eastwards along a 1,800-kilometre front. The Luftwaffe and Panzer tanks spearhead Operation Barbarossa, which in its first weeks appears set to provide another textbook example of the German blitzkrieg's effectiveness.

But then the advance stalls. Perhaps the Soviet Union was too large a mouthful for the Wehrmacht? The year ends with Japan's attack on the US naval base at Pearl Harbor, and another huge military power enters the fray, which is now an all-out world war.

Tank battles roar up and down the Eastern Front, while fighters and bombers duel with mighty aircraft carriers in the Pacific. In this special issue, follow the progress of World War II from start to finish.

Enjoy the issue!

German tanks roar forward

A brand new tactic makes the Germans almost invincible in the war's first year. But at the end of 1941 the blitzkrieg freezes.

1939-45

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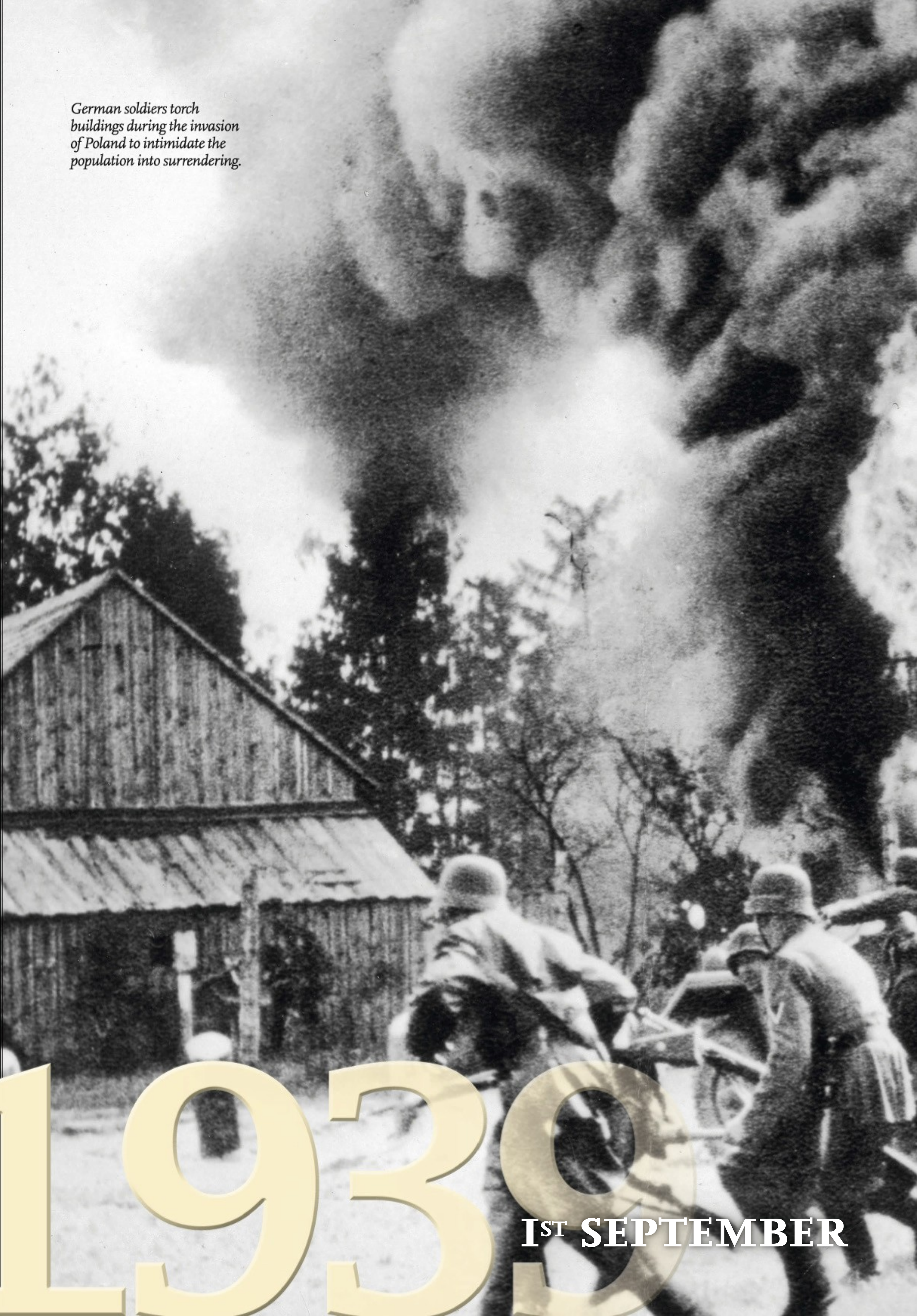


German soldiers torch buildings during the invasion of Poland to intimidate the population into surrendering.

1939

1st SEPTEMBER

GERMAN TROOPS INVADE POLAND

Adolf Hitler takes a huge gamble when he decides to attack Poland. The country must be defeated quickly to prevent Western European powers – principally Britain and France – from interfering. But the campaign does not go entirely according to the Führer's plan.

THE STAGE IS SET

Hitler aims to clear Eastern Europe for resettlement by Aryan Germans as part of his Lebensraum policy. He has taken Austria and Czechoslovakia without a fight; next up is Poland. But while its army is antiquated, Poland has guarantees of support from France and Britain. Regardless, Hitler decides to take a chance...

POLAND
Warsaw

At dawn on 1st September 1939, the German battleship SMS *Schleswig-Holstein* turned its giant guns towards Westerplatte peninsula on the Polish Baltic coast near the port city of Danzig (now Gdansk). At 04.48, the guns opened up and eight shells thundered towards the south-east corner of the city's garrison, creating three large holes in its outside wall and setting its oil storage dumps ablaze.

A few minutes later, three elite divisions of German marines attacked, but the garrison's small force – numbering around 200 Polish troops – put up a stubborn resistance. At 06.22, the marines radioed the battleship to report that they were retreating following heavy losses. Two-and-a-half hours later, the marines attacked again, this time reinforced with 60 soldiers from SS-Heimwehr. They forced their way through the garrison's outer wall, but their progress was slowed by mines, felled trees, barbed wire and gunfire. By midday, the demoralised SS soldiers fled, and the marines, whose captain was wounded, had also had enough. Fighting on the first day had cost 82 Germans lives, but the peninsula didn't fall.

Polish military cap from 1939. The Polish army was unprepared for war.

The Germans finally overran the headland after a week of dogged fighting, thanks to the support of a torpedo boat and 60 aircraft, which dropped over 100 bombs. On 7th September at 09.45, the exhausted Polish defenders finally hoisted the white flag.

The entire Polish army continued to stubbornly resist despite the Germans' being the superior force on paper. The invasion comprised two armies of 882,000 and 630,000 men respectively. The first group attacked from the north, while the second advanced from the west and south. The German army was modern and well-organised, while many of the Polish units had been mobilised at the last minute.

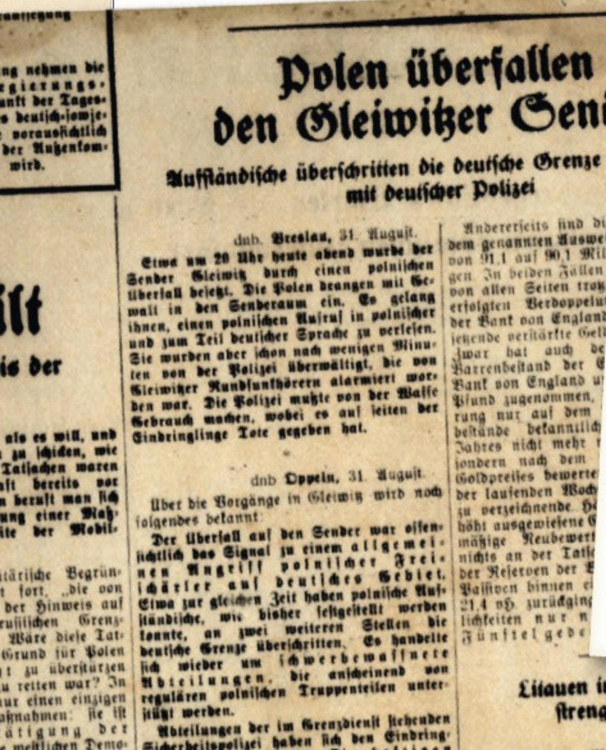
Hitler expected a quick victory, but the Poles' robust defence spelled potential danger for the Führer's ambitions. The jokers in the pack were Britain and France – World War I's two major victors. If Hitler's army became bogged down in a protracted campaign in Poland, Germany's west flank would be left exposed. If Britain and France immediately went on the offensive, they could end the Nazi dictator's campaign before it began.

Western powers ruled by frightened men

Hitler had good reason to believe that the two great powers would hesitate, however. At the Munich Conference in 1938, he'd insisted that Czechoslovakia cede the predominantly German-speaking Sudetenland to Germany, and both French and British prime ministers – Édouard Daladier and Neville Chamberlain respectively – had agreed to his demands. Their capitulation convinced Hitler that France and Britain were ruled by frightened, easily manipulated men.

Hitler saw no reason to curtail his territorial plundering. In March 1939, he subjugated the rest of the Czech territory – Bohemia and Moravia – and converted the Slovak part of the former Czechoslovakia into a German puppet state with free passage for German troops. His aggressive manoeuvres were forming a net around Poland, which was now surrounded by German troops on three sides.

An invasion of Poland would allow the dictator to avenge the wrongs he believed to have been committed in World War I, in



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Polen überfallen den Gleiwitzer Sender

Aufſtändiſche überſchritten die deutſche Grenze — Kämpfe mit deutſcher Polizei

dnb. Breslau, 31. Auguſt.

Etwa um 20 Uhr heute abend wurde der Sender Gleiwitz durch einen polniſchen Überfall beſetzt. Die Polen drangen mit Gewalt in den Senderaum ein. Es gelang ihnen, einen polniſchen Aufruf in polniſcher und zum Teil deutſcher Sprache zu verleſen. Sie wurden aber ſchon nach wenigen Minuten von der Polizei überwältigt, die von Gleiwitzer Rundfunkhörern alarmiert worden war. Die Polizei mußte von der Waffe Gebrauch machen, wobei es auf ſeiten der Eindringlinge Tote gegeben hat.

*

dnb Oppeln, 31. Auguſt.

Über die Vorgänge in Gleiwitz wird noch folgendes bekannt:

Der Überfall auf den Sender war offenſichtlich das Signal zu einem allgemeinen Angriff polniſcher Freiſchärler auf deutſches Gebiet. Etwa zur gleichen Zeit haben polniſche Aufſtändiſche, wie bisher feſtgeſtellt werden konnte, an zwei weiteren Stellen die deutſche Grenze überſchritten. Es handelte ſich wieder um ſchwerbewaffnete Abteilungen, die anſcheinend von regulären polniſchen Truppenteilen unterſtützt werden.

Abteilungen der im Grenzdienſt ſtehenden Sicherheitspolizei haben ſich den Eindring-

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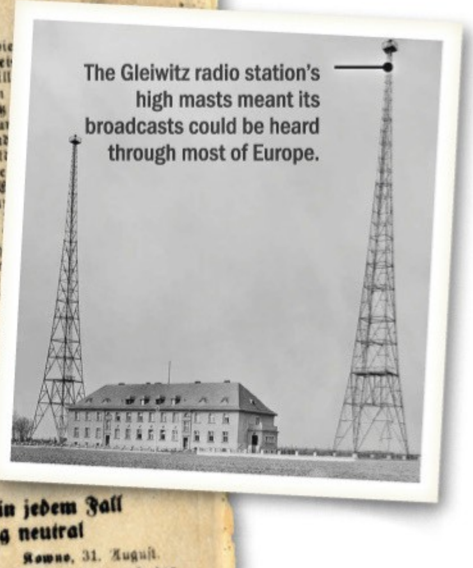
Litauen in jedem Fall ſtreng neutral

Kowno, 31. Auguſt.



The Gleiwitz radio station's high masts meant its broadcasts could be heard through most of Europe.

The SS conducted a fake attack on the radio station at Gleiwitz to give Hitler a pretext to invade Poland.

The battleship SMS Schleswig-Holstein *had fought in World War I but remained fully operational.*

which Germany had been forced to cede lands to Poland, including the coal-rich region of Upper Silesia. The Treaty of Versailles had also seen the port city of Danzig become a free city administered by the People's Confederation (the forerunner of the UN). And worst of all from a German point of view, Poland had been granted the Polish Corridor. This was a stretch of land that cut between Germany and East Prussia and gave Poland access to the Baltic Sea. It was an arrangement many Germans found deeply humiliating.

In addition to the desire to regain lands lost at the end of World War I, Nazi racial ideology dictated that Germany was entitled to Lebensraum – a colonial settlement of Eastern Europe, at the expense of what the Germans perceived to be a subhuman Slavic population.

During 1939, several signs of impending aggression emerged: on 22nd March, the Germans occupied the Lithuanian port of Memel (now Klaipeda), which until 1919 had been in German hands. Hitler also demanded that Danzig be reunited with Germany and that his government be granted rights to build transport links across the Polish Corridor.

Guarantee infuriated Hitler

The diplomatic row between Germany and Poland forced Britain to intervene. On 31st March in the House of Commons, Chamberlain proclaimed that Britain would support Polish independence and Danzig's continued status as a free city. The British guarantee angered Hitler. At the same time, it became clear to the Führer that Polish leaders intended to cede few – if any – concessions to Germany in the corridor, let alone voluntarily join the pro-German bloc. The Nazi dictator became convinced that the Polish question would have to be solved by military means.

1.4 million

German soldiers invaded Poland, supported by 2,600 tanks and 2,000 aircraft. Against them stood just 700,000 Polish soldiers with 750 tanks and 900 aircraft.

By this point, Hitler had already ordered his generals to begin forming a detailed plan for an attack on Poland under the codename *Fall Weiss* (Operation White). However, several of his commanders were sceptical and believed that Hitler's scheme was too risky. Their fears were well founded. In May 1939, Poland's Minister of Military Affairs, Lieutenant-General Tadeusz Kasprzycki, travelled to Paris to sign the Kasprzycki-Gamelin Convention. This committed the French army to launching a massive attack on Germany with 38 divisions within 15 days of Poland being attacked. But despite the commanders' scepticism, in spring 1939 Hitler still believed that Western European powers would not intervene. The head of the Luftwaffe, Hermann Göring, suggested that the Führer might adopt a more cautious approach, but Hitler responded that he had always gone for broke: "I have played va banque all my life", he said.

Fierce battles bolstered both sides' morale

The garrison at Westerplatte wasn't well known in 1939, but the location of the war's first battle proved to be hugely symbolic.

The Polish garrison on the Westerplatte peninsula proved far harder to defeat than German commanders had envisioned. While their eventual victory proved symbolic for the invaders, the dogged defence also played a central role in bolstering Polish morale.

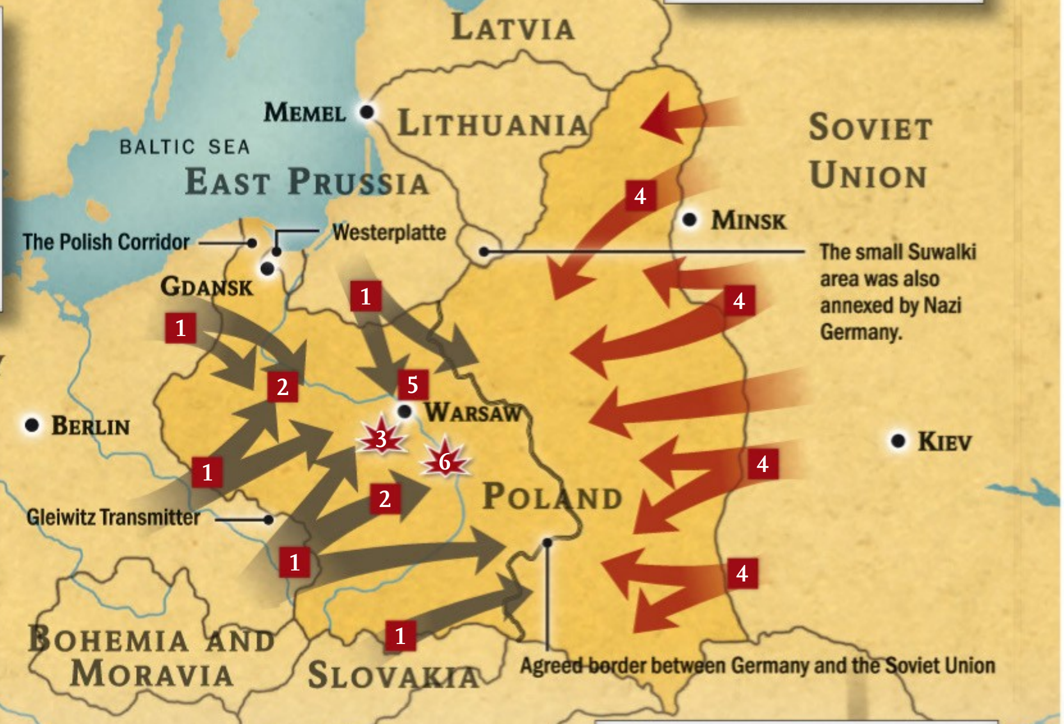
The capture of Westerplatte was so important that Hitler visited the battlefield after the fighting. He inspected the ruins and went aboard the battleship *SMS Schleswig-Holstein*, which launched the bombardment.

For Polish soldiers across the country, the defence of Westerplatte gave them the faith to fight on. The garrison's heroics also had an effect on the Germans who allowed its commander, Major Henryk Sucharski, to keep his sword after surrendering.

The generals presented the Fall Weiss strategy on 15th June 1939. The plan was straightforward: Army Group North comprising two armies would attack the

Poles caught in deadly crossfire

Poland had Europe's fourth largest army in 1939, but its equipment was outdated and relatively few soldiers had been mobilised when the Germans invaded. A difficult situation became impossible when the Soviet Union also attacked from the east.


Latvia
Memel
Lithuania
Baltic Sea
East Prussia
Soviet Union
Minsk
The Polish Corridor
Westerplatte
Gdansk
Germany
Berlin
Warsaw
Kiev
Poland
Gleiwitz Transmitter
Bohemia and Moravia
Slovakia
Agreed border between Germany and the Soviet Union
1
2
3
4
5
6

The small Suwalki area was also annexed by Nazi Germany.

1 Germany crosses border

1st September: German troops invade Poland from the north (East Prussia), west (Germany) and south (Slovakia). The army makes gains everywhere despite a number of significant losses.

2 Hitler goes to the front

4th September: the campaign begins smoothly with the advance guard penetrating far into the country. By 4th September, Hitler is visiting areas close to the front.

Hitler felt safe enough to visit units near the front.

3 Poles hit back

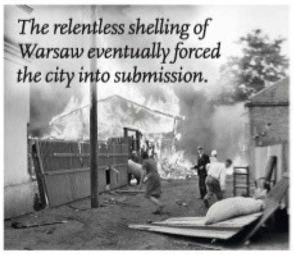
9th September: the Polish Army counterattacks by the River Bzura. It enjoys initial success before the Germans bring in reinforcements, winning the battle just 10 days later.

4 Soviets invade from the east

17th September: following their agreement with Germany, the Soviets invade Eastern Poland. A war on two fronts is too much for the Poles and the Soviets advance quickly and easily.

5 Capital is forced to surrender

27th September: Warsaw falls. After intense bombing by aircraft and artillery, the Polish capital surrenders. Much of the city is destroyed, and around 25,000 civilians have been killed.



The relentless shelling of Warsaw eventually forced the city into submission.

6 Germans celebrate victory

6th October: when the battle of Kock ends, the last Polish forces surrender. Poland is fully occupied by the Soviet Union and Germany. On 5th October, the Germans hold a victory parade in Warsaw.

About 60 German divisions took part in the campaign against Poland, and the panzer units in particular enjoyed easy successes on the flat terrain.

northern part of Poland, while Army Group South's three armies would invade from the south. But there was still one unresolved question: how would the Soviet Union react to its neighbour being invaded by Germany?

Joseph Stalin had watched Hitler's manoeuvring in Europe with great interest. The Soviet dictator harboured his own territorial ambitions, including the subjugation of the Baltic nations, parts of Finland, Bessarabia (an area spanning parts of modern-day Moldova and Ukraine) and Eastern Poland. The territories had belonged to the Russian Tsarist Empire and Stalin considered them to be a part of the Soviet Union.

The solution to both nations' desire for enlargement came through a mutual agreement. On 23rd August, German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop boarded a flight to Moscow. Early the next day, von Ribbentrop and his Soviet colleague Vyacheslav Molotov signed the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. The two countries pledged neutrality in case of war with a third party. But the pact also included a secret protocol that allowed Eastern Europe to be divided according to Soviet and German interests. Germany's included Western Poland, while the Soviets claimed Finland and Eastern Poland. The agreement gave Germany a free hand to occupy half of Poland without provoking the Soviet Union, while Stalin could subdue the old Russian territories.

With the agreement in place, Hitler was ready to launch his campaign in the East, and on 25th August 1939, German troops were ordered to launch their attack the following day. But at the last minute, the Führer hesitated and rescinded the order. However, the message did not reach all sections, and several Wehrmacht units made small inroads into Polish territory. The Polish military ordered a full, if hasty, mobilisation of its forces in response on 31st August.

Hitler's hesitation was due in part to Chamberlain's promise, made on 24th August, that Britain would offer military support in the event of a German attack on Poland. But the delay also gave the dictator the opportunity to secure a pretext for his attack. If Hitler could claim that the Poles had struck first, it would be a useful weapon in a war of propaganda.

NAME **VYACHESLAV MOLOTOV**

TITLE **POLITICIAN AND DIPLOMAT**

1890-1986

Soviet politician was demoted

Molotov was one of Stalin's closest allies, and was trusted with signing the non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union in August 1939 that led to the invasion of Poland. Molotov held several prominent positions, but later fell out of favour and was demoted to Ambassador of Mongolia in 1957.

- **Secretary of the Central Committee.**
- **Foreign Minister 1939-49, 1953-56.**

FARMER BECAME THE WAR'S FIRST VICTIM

On the evening of 31st August, 27-year-old SS-Sturmbannführer Alfred Helmut Naujocks, together with a small handful of SS soldiers disguised as Poles, reached the radio transmitter in Gleiwitz (now Gliwice), a small town in what was then German territory, near the Polish border. The SS soldiers had no trouble penetrating the building where the radio transmitter was located. The concierge had left his post and the two police officers who normally guarded the transmitter had been hoodwinked into being elsewhere. In the transmitter room itself, the soldiers attacked four men and led them down to the basement. Then the SS soldiers broadcast a radio message, partly in Polish: "Achtung, achtung! This is Gleiwitz. The radio station is in Polish hands". The spokesman referred to himself as a Polish

PzKpfw II (Panzerkampfwagen II)

Weight	8.9 tonnes
Crew	3 men
Main weapon	20-mm gun
Top speed	40 km/h
Armour	5-14 mm
Number in 1939	1,223

GUN SMASHED THROUGH ARMOUR

PzKpfw II was armed with a 20-mm gun, which could penetrate the armour of all contemporary Polish tanks. PzKpfw II was a big improvement over its predecessor, which had only two machine guns. The Germans organised the tanks into highly efficient special operational units.

7TPjw

Weight	9.9 tonnes
Crew	3 men
Main weapon	37-mm gun
Top speed	37 km/h
Armour	5-17 mm
Number in 1939	95

TANKS WERE OUTNUMBERED

In 1935 the Polish Army ordered its own version of Britain's Vickers tank. The first version, named 7TPjw, was the best Polish tank in 1939 and was superior to most German tanks. But the Poles didn't have enough of them to make a decisive difference to the war's outcome.

German troops met almost no resistance in places like Sopot when they crossed the border.

freedom fighter and read an anti-German statement that ended with the words "Long live Poland".

Poles went on the defensive

The German plan was to surround and then destroy the Polish army as quickly as possible, allowing German troops to be redeployed back home to counter any French offensive.

The Poles' plan, however, was to pursue a dilatory and defensive war to allow the country time to complete its delayed mobilisation and give the French and British an opportunity to attack the Germans from the west.

Unfortunately, not all the Polish units were prepared for a modern war. It was one of few countries to have maintained a large cavalry, which proved to be no match for the German war machine. On the first day of the invasion near Krojanty in the northern part of the country, a Polish cavalry regiment launched an attack on a German infantry unit. Suddenly, armoured vehicles burst out of a nearby forest to attack the regiment. Around 20 riders – including the commander – were killed before the remaining soldiers managed to turn their horses and escape.

Despite mounting fierce opposition, the Polish troops were slowly retreating. German Stuka dive bombers posed a serious threat to both ground forces and civilians who fled in their thousands. From the beginning of the invasion, the Luftwaffe terrorised towns and villages. The idea was to wear down the resistance of the Polish people so that the country would be forced to surrender. In the 40 days it took to subjugate Poland, more than 150,000 civilians were killed.

Despite the catastrophic situation, many Poles still clung to the hope of help arriving from Britain and France. On the evening of 1st September, their prayers seemed to be answered: the British demanded that Germany cease its hostilities against Poland and immediately withdraw their troops. But the British set no time limit. The French for their part put off making a formal declaration of war for two to three days to give the French reserve forces time to move into position. After consulting with the French prime minister, Chamberlain decided to issue a final ultimatum to the Germans on 2nd September. The notice was to be conveyed by the British ambassador in Berlin, Neville Henderson, to Germany's foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop the following morning.

The Infantry Assault Badge was given to Waffen-SS and Wehrmacht soldiers after the campaign against Poland.

The Führer froze

A little before 09.00, Henderson arrived at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, von Ribbentrop did not want to meet the ambassador. Instead, he left his interpreter, Paul Schmidt, to meet with Henderson while he was driven to the Reich Chancellory. Schmidt and Henderson stood awkwardly facing one another in the foreign secretary's office as the British ambassador read out the ultimatum: "If His Majesty's Government has not received satisfactory assurances of the cessation of all aggressive action against Poland, and the withdrawal of German troops from that country, by 11 o'clock British Summer Time, from that time a state of war will exist between Great Britain and Germany."

Schmidt put the ultimatum in his bag and hurried to the Reich Chancellory, where he related the British terms to von Ribbentrop and Hitler, who was seated behind his desk.

"When I finished there was complete silence. Hitler sat immobile, gazing before him," the interpreter later recounted. After a while, Hitler turned towards the foreign minister with a furious look and asked in a tone that suggested he had been ill-advised: "What now?"

Von Ribbentrop replied, "I assume that the French will hand in a similar ultimatum within the hour." Only 20 minutes after the expiry of the deadline, Berlin rejected

Britain's demands. But by then the British government had already declared war on Germany. Almost six hours later, the French declaration that von Ribbentrop predicted arrived.

That same evening, the German dictator, worrying about a great European war that he had hoped to avoid, boarded his private armoured train to visit the front in Poland. Before the train departed, however, Hitler confided to his trusted propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, that he still believed that Britain and France would only conduct a *kartfferelkreig* (potato war): an economic blockade, rather than all-out war.

German pincers snapped shut

Things seemed to be going to plan for Hitler's troops in Poland. The Wehrmacht had already taken several towns and, in the south-west of Poland, German tanks crossed the River Warta. Despite declaring war, the British and French governments seemed reluctant to intervene.

On 6th September, the Germans captured Krakow, and on the same day the British Military Mission in Poland sent an ominous report to London stating that "the two most dangerous [German] attacks at present are those of the motorised groups from Silesia and the forces moving southwards on Warsaw from East Prussia. Should these two arms of the pincers succeed in effecting a junction, a large portion of the old Polish Army might be surrounded". The situation was dire for the Poles, and their commanders urgently needed to find an effective response to the German offensive.

The Polish army's answer came on 9th September, when a counteroffensive led by General Tadeusz Kutrzeba was launched at the Bzura River just over 100 kilometres west of Warsaw. The general's aim was to interrupt the Germans' advance towards the Polish capital and at the same time recapture the towns of Leczyca and Piatek further south. In the beginning, Kutrzeba benefitted from a tailwind, because the Germans underestimated the size of the Polish forces. The Poles entered Leczyca, where fierce house-to-house fighting took place, then after several attempts, they also succeeded in taking Piatek.

A German company, which was defending one of the approach roads to the city, came under heavy shelling and sought cover in trenches left over from World War I. The company commander, Captain Christian Kinder, subsequently wrote about the incident in his book *Männer der Nordmark an der Bzura*.

"In intervals of three to five minutes, hand and rifle grenades landed in the company's trenches. This section was methodically and with surprising accuracy from the right to the left bombarded... Two men very near to the Company were riddled with fine fragments and were killed immediately... each man now literally felt the moment come when the next hand grenade would strike him. "

Christian Kinder was one of the few men from the »

After the war, von Ribbentrop was convicted of crimes against humanity and hanged.

1893-1946

NAME **JOACHIM VON RIBBENTROP**

TITLE **FOREIGN MINISTER**

Top Nazi pursued Jews throughout Europe

As a well-travelled businessman Joachim von Ribbentrop had a better knowledge of world politics than most senior Nazis. Following his enrolment in the Nazi Party in 1932, he dreamed of a career as Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs. Hitler first sent von Ribbentrop to London as an ambassador, but in 1938 his dream came true when he succeeded Konstantin von Neurath as head at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Von Ribbentrop's proudest moment came in 1939 when, along with his Soviet colleague Molotov, he signed a non-aggression pact between the two countries. Elsewhere, his role included helping to exterminate Jews in occupied countries, which was principally the reason for his later war crimes conviction.

- **German Foreign Minister 1938-45.**
- **Stood trial at Nuremberg and was executed in 1946.**

Nine-year-old Ryszard Pajewski sits in the ruins of what was once his home in Warsaw.

company to survive the fighting. The following day, two German infantry divisions withdrew in chaos. One of the divisions reported to headquarters that the situation was "exceptionally serious" and urged it to send reinforcements. Captain Kinder noted that some of his men, "shaken by the superior power of the enemy, were beginning to be resigned".

The German soldiers' fighting spirit was further weakened when Polish cavalry attacked them from the rear.

Poles lost communications

Shortly after, German High Command reacted by reorganising its forces. At the same time, Polish troops ran into trouble. The units had no air support, and in some places even had to advance without cover from artillery or proper communication, partly because their phone lines had been destroyed. Yet the Poles managed to advance for two days before the Germans beat them back during an attack on 11th September, where they recaptured several kilometres of territory. The following day, the German forces – which now possessed four times as many tanks as the Poles – were on the front foot once more.

560 tonnes of explosives and 70 tonnes of firebombs were dropped by the Luftwaffe over Warsaw during the final days of the campaign, turning the city into an inferno.

Now it was Kutrzeba's turn to regroup, which gave the Germans time to bring up reinforcements. On 16th September, a German armoured corps attacked from the east, and an armoured division broke through a Polish infantry division's line of defence. Kutrzeba's forces were surrounded and the Luftwaffe relentlessly attacked the encircled Polish troops.

Polish cavalryman Klemens Rudnicki was one of the lucky ones who escaped the pocket. But his fleeing unit was ambushed and surrounded by German forces in a nearby forested area. The Polish cavalry dismounted and fought on the ground: "bullets buzzed like wasps; the artillery began to respond; it was quite impossible to emerge from the forest", Rudnicki wrote later. Only after dark did the Polish cavalry succeed in escaping.

By 21st September, the Battle of Bzura was over. Two Polish armies were shattered, and 100,000 soldiers were either dead or in German captivity. The road to Warsaw was now open for the German main force to join the foremost panzer units, which had reached the city walls on 7th September.

Over the following days, a trinity of tanks, artillery and aircraft bombarded the Polish capital. A Polish officer who participated in the defence of the Warsaw district of Praga described the attacks on 10th September in his diary: “The nerves of the people are still frayed from yesterday’s shelling. All about us buildings lie in ruins. The fire at the Transfiguration hospital with its several hundred wounded was a ghastly business. I saw a soldier with both legs amputated crawling from the building on his elbows; other wounded jumped out of the windows on the pavement. Five doctors and several nurses perished in the fire.”

By mid-September, Warsaw was completely surrounded. The Germans demanded that the capital surrender, but the commander of the city’s defence stubbornly refused.

Doomed city would not give up

By the end of September 1939, the city had a post-apocalyptic air. The bodies of people and horses filled the streets, much of the city lay in ruins, and water pipes, electricity, hospitals and railway stations were smashed. The survivors were starving, drinking water was running out and doctors warned of the risk of disease.

The situation in Warsaw stemmed from Hitler’s dissatisfaction that the city had not yet surrendered. As the city continued to hold out, the impatient Führer ordered the Luftwaffe to carry out a relentless bombing campaign. On 25th September, 1,200 aircraft attacked the city. The crews bombed both the capital’s industrial estates and residential areas. The following day, the artillery arrived to join in the shelling, while the infantry stormed the condemned city as it burned.

Finally, on 27th September Warsaw gave up the struggle. 30,000 people had been killed in the inferno, but there was more bad news for the beleaguered Poles: on 17th September, Stalin’s Red Army had crossed Poland’s eastern border, and by the time Warsaw surrendered, the Soviet forces were already at the line agreed by Ribbentrop and Molotov. Stalin and Hitler were well on their way to wiping the democratic Polish nation off the map.

The Polish government had already fled to Romania and on 6th October, the last Polish forces surrendered. The Polish army had suffered a loss of 70,000 dead and 133,000 wounded in the war against the Germans, while another 50,000 had fallen in the fighting with the Red Army. In comparison, the Germans reported losses of just 11,000 dead and 30,000 people wounded.

So far, Hitler was winning his high-stakes game: he had captured Western Poland without Britain or France having actively intervened. But now that the two countries had declared war, there were new players at the table and the endgame was far from certain.

PERSPECTIVE

Polish army was exiled

Poland’s defeat marked the end of Poland’s army. Many soldiers fled when the country surrendered, but later played an important role in the war.

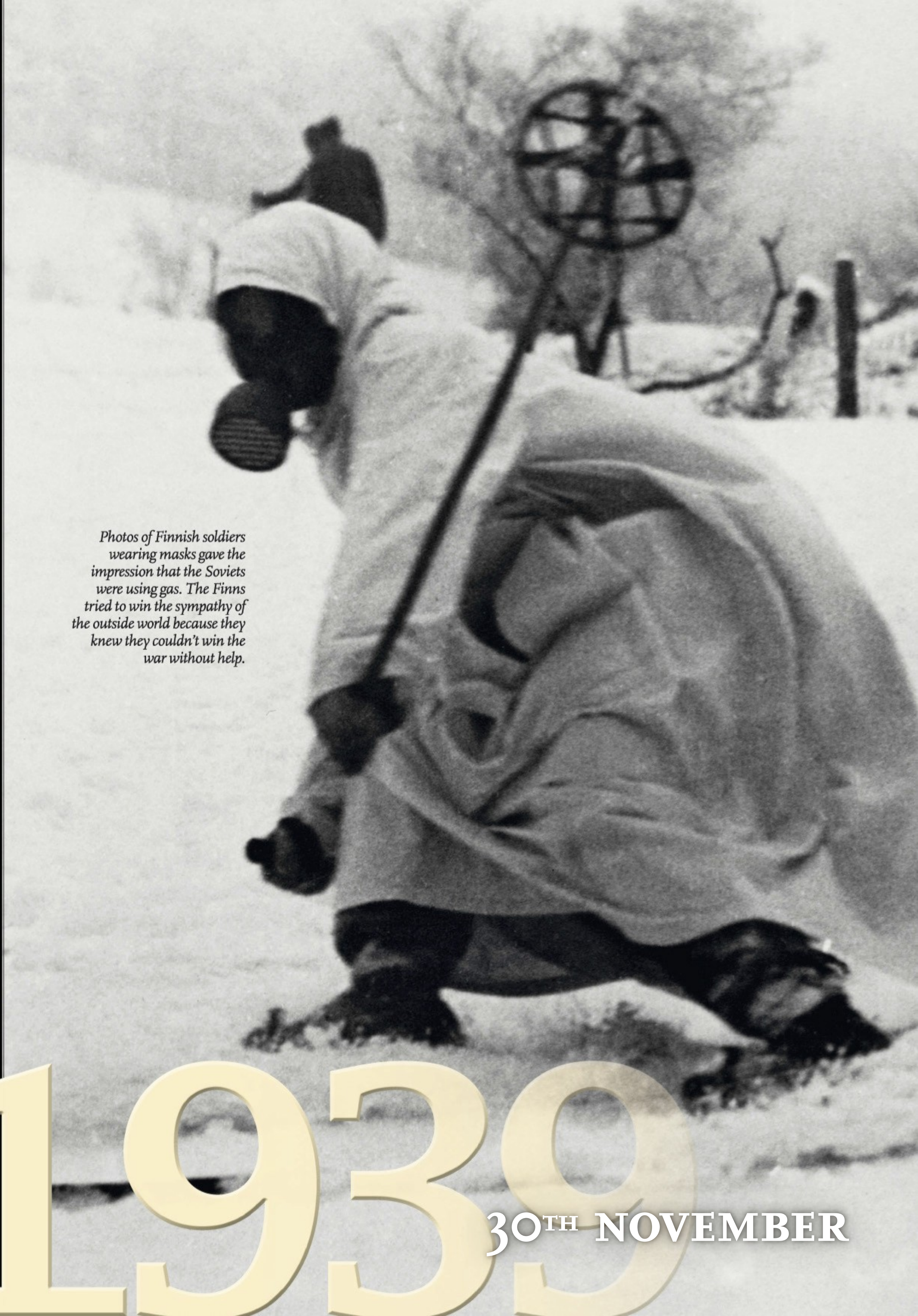
Although Hitler’s troops surrounded large parts of the Polish army, many soldiers and pilots managed to escape. Almost 100,000 men crossed the border into Romania, which was still neutral at that time. The vast majority went on to France, where 75,000 Polish soldiers participated in the fight against Nazi Germany in 1940. When France also fell, the Poles fled to Britain. If you include Polish deserters forced to fight in the German army, the number of Poles fighting in exile during the war was around 250,000.

During the Battle of Britain in 1940, Polish pilots played a particularly vital role. Although the Poles only made up five percent of the pilots in the Royal Air Force, they accounted for 12 percent of the RAF’s victories in the battle. Of the 1,736 aircraft the Germans lost, 203 were shot down by Polish pilots.

A significant part of the Polish fleet also escaped. Many of the ships reached Britain and took part in the sinking of the great German Battleship *Bismarck* in May 1941.

Many Poles received medals for their efforts on the Western Front.

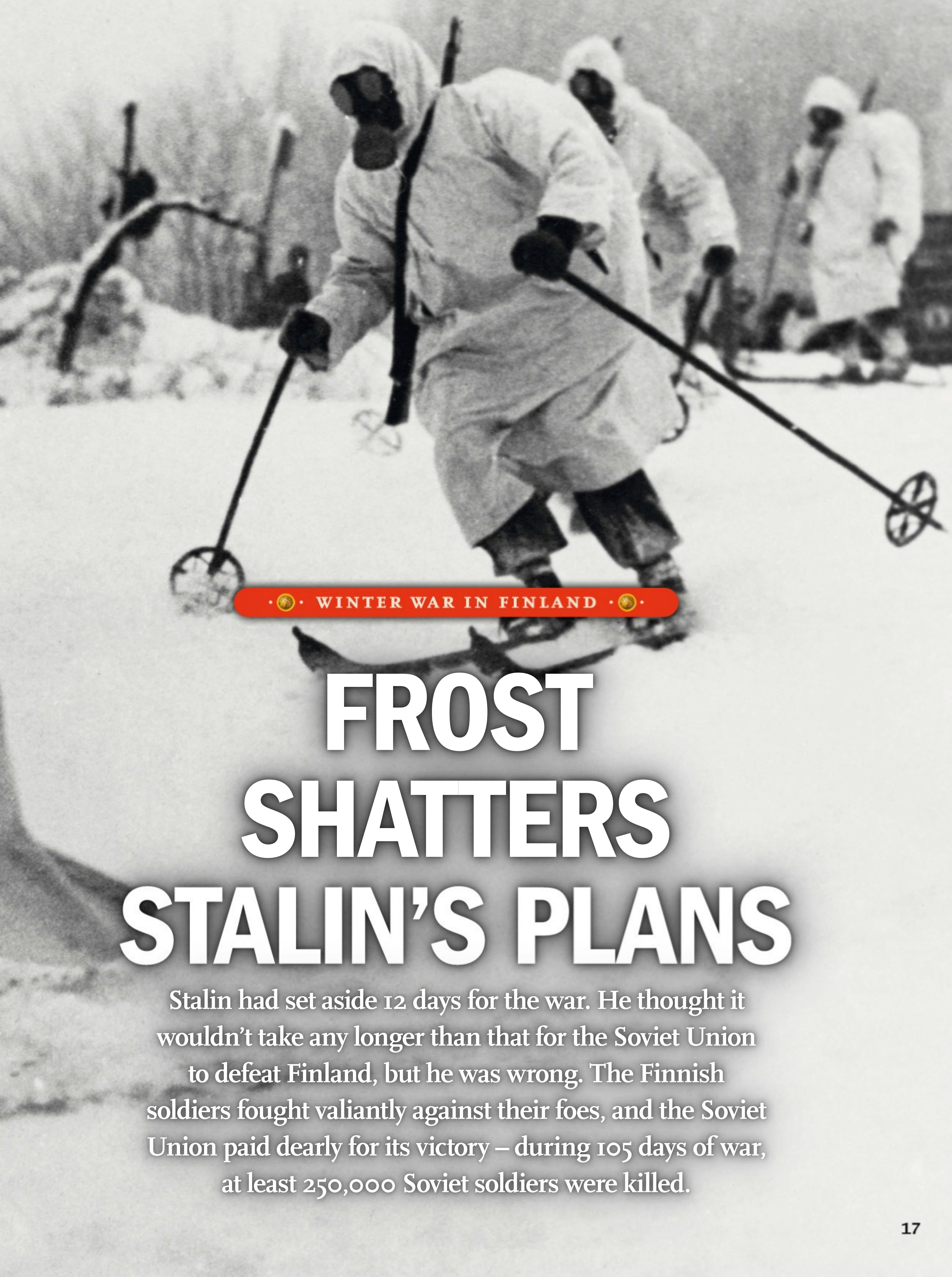
Polish fighter pilots had their own squadron based in England.



Photos of Finnish soldiers wearing masks gave the impression that the Soviets were using gas. The Finns tried to win the sympathy of the outside world because they knew they couldn't win the war without help.

1939

30TH NOVEMBER



WINTER WAR IN FINLAND

FROST SHATTERS STALIN'S PLANS

Stalin had set aside 12 days for the war. He thought it wouldn't take any longer than that for the Soviet Union to defeat Finland, but he was wrong. The Finnish soldiers fought valiantly against their foes, and the Soviet Union paid dearly for its victory – during 105 days of war, at least 250,000 Soviet soldiers were killed.

Finland 1939

THE STAGE IS SET

FINLAND
Helsinki

It had been a long road to independence. Finland had once belonged to Sweden, but was ceded to Russia in 1809. It finally succeeded in becoming independent in 1917 following the revolution in Russia. Now Stalin is making territorial demands, but the Finns won't give up their hard-won freedom without a fight.

The pale morning sun hung low over Helsinki on 30th November 1939. Without warning, nine Soviet bombers emerged from the clouds and began an unscheduled flight over Finland's capital. Above the harbour, one aircraft dropped its payload without hitting a single ship. The planes then continued towards the town centre, probably intending to bomb the main train station, but they missed. All the bombs fell on the central square, killing 40 people.

3.7 million people lived in Finland in 1939. The small country was up against the Soviet Union, which had a population of around 170 million.

Straight after, the planes spread out. Some bombed the airport – but only hit a hangar – others attacked the city's technical college, where students and teachers lost their lives. The Soviets flew back and forth dropping their last bombs. A few planes reached a residential neighbourhood, before the aircraft regrouped and disappeared to the east.

Only then did the city's air-raid siren go off. But the noise of the sirens merely confirmed that Finland was at war with its mighty neighbour to the east, the Soviet Union. Four hours later, the Soviets returned with 15 bombers. In total, 91 of Helsinki's inhabitants perished that day.

A car wound its way through the chaos. In the passenger seat was the country's defence chief, Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim. It should have been his last day on the job – he was unhappy with the government, and had sought to leave. Mannerheim wanted a bigger military budget, but was refused. He'd recommended a more lenient policy towards Stalin, but his plan was rejected. Now everyone knew that the Finnish-Swedish aristocrat was the person to save Finland.

On the first day of the Winter War, Helsinki was attacked twice by Soviet bombers – 91 people were killed.

Desire to protect Leningrad

The conflict with the USSR had been going on for several years, and on 18th October 1939, Josef Stalin had put his demands on the table: Finland must abandon the Karelian Isthmus, destroy its defences to the east, and allow a Soviet naval base on the Hanko Peninsula. This would give the Soviet industrial city of Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg) more of a buffer against possible military attacks.

The Finns rejected Stalin's demands and assured him that Leningrad had nothing to fear, because no foreign power would be allowed to use Finnish territory for an attack.

The Finns suspected that Stalin's demands were just the first in a long line that would culminate in their country being swallowed up by the Soviet Union. But in Moscow, Stalin couldn't understand how the little country could be so confident. He became suspicious and assumed the Finns must have made secret deals with enemies of the Soviet Union. He decided to take the Finnish territories by force.

He appointed Marshal Kirill Meretskov, Leningrad's military commander, as head of the invading army.

Finnish forces to be smashed

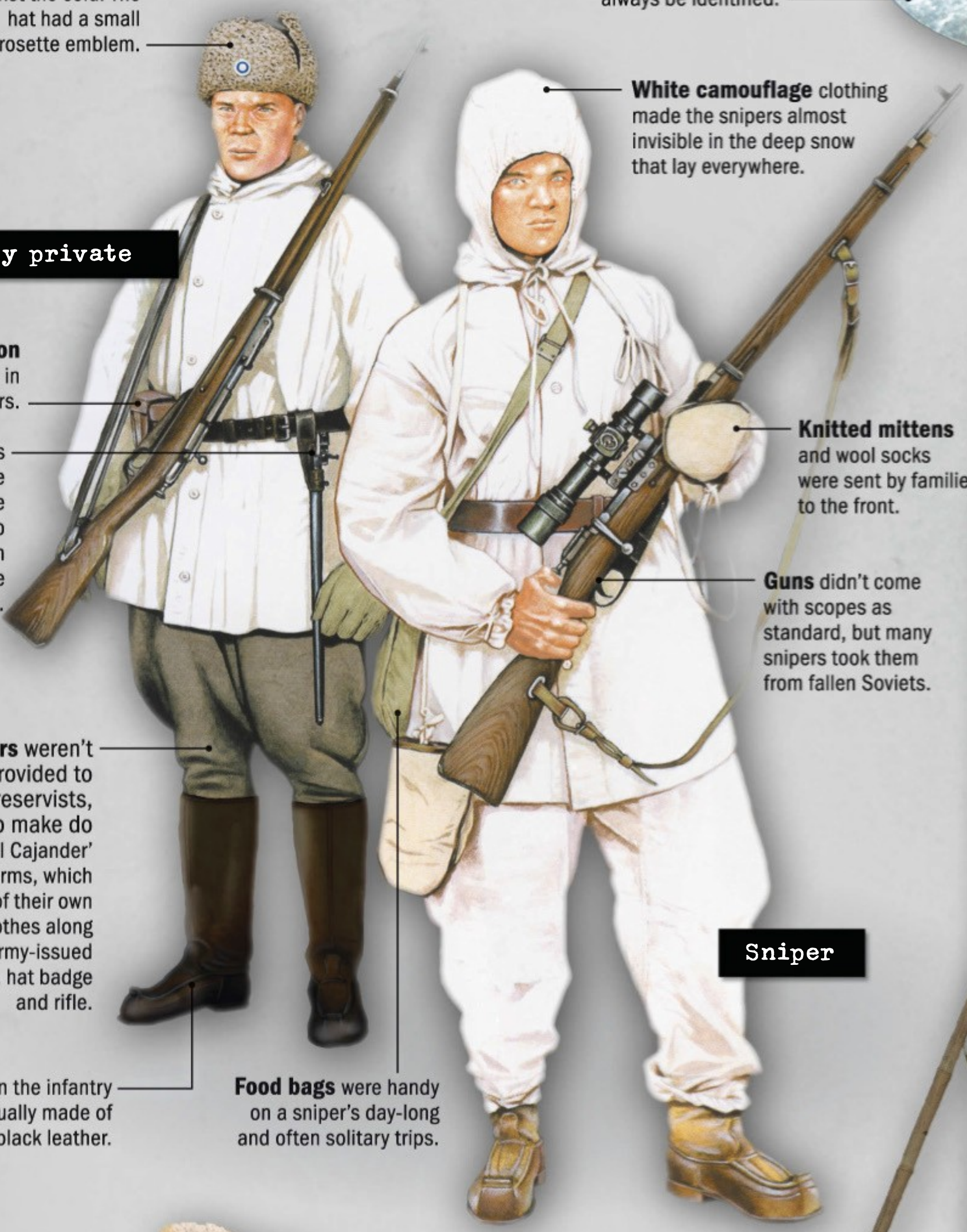
On the night of 30th November, all the preparations had been completed. Meretskov commanded his mighty army into battle: "Comrades, soldiers of the Red Army, officers, commissars and political workers! To fulfil the Soviet government's and our great Fatherland's will, I hereby order: the troops in Leningrad Military District are to march over the frontier, crush the Finnish forces, and once and for all secure the Soviet Union's north-western borders and Lenin's city, the crib of the revolution of the proletariat."

Over the 1,000 km border – from the Barents Sea in the north to the Baltic Sea in the south – Meretskov's armies rolled into Finland. He had 500,000 soldiers, three times more than the Finns. Meretskov also had

Soldiers lacked equipment

The Finnish army didn't have enough clothing and equipment for every soldier when the war broke out in autumn 1939. Many had to bring their own skis and winter gear.

Identity tags ensured that fallen soldiers could always be identified.



Fur hat protected against the cold. The hat had a small rosette emblem.

White camouflage clothing made the snipers almost invisible in the deep snow that lay everywhere.

Ammunition was stored in small containers.

A bayonet was carried by some soldiers, while many had to settle for an ordinary knife called a *puukko*.

Knitted mittens and wool socks were sent by families to the front.

Guns didn't come with scopes as standard, but many snipers took them from fallen Soviets.

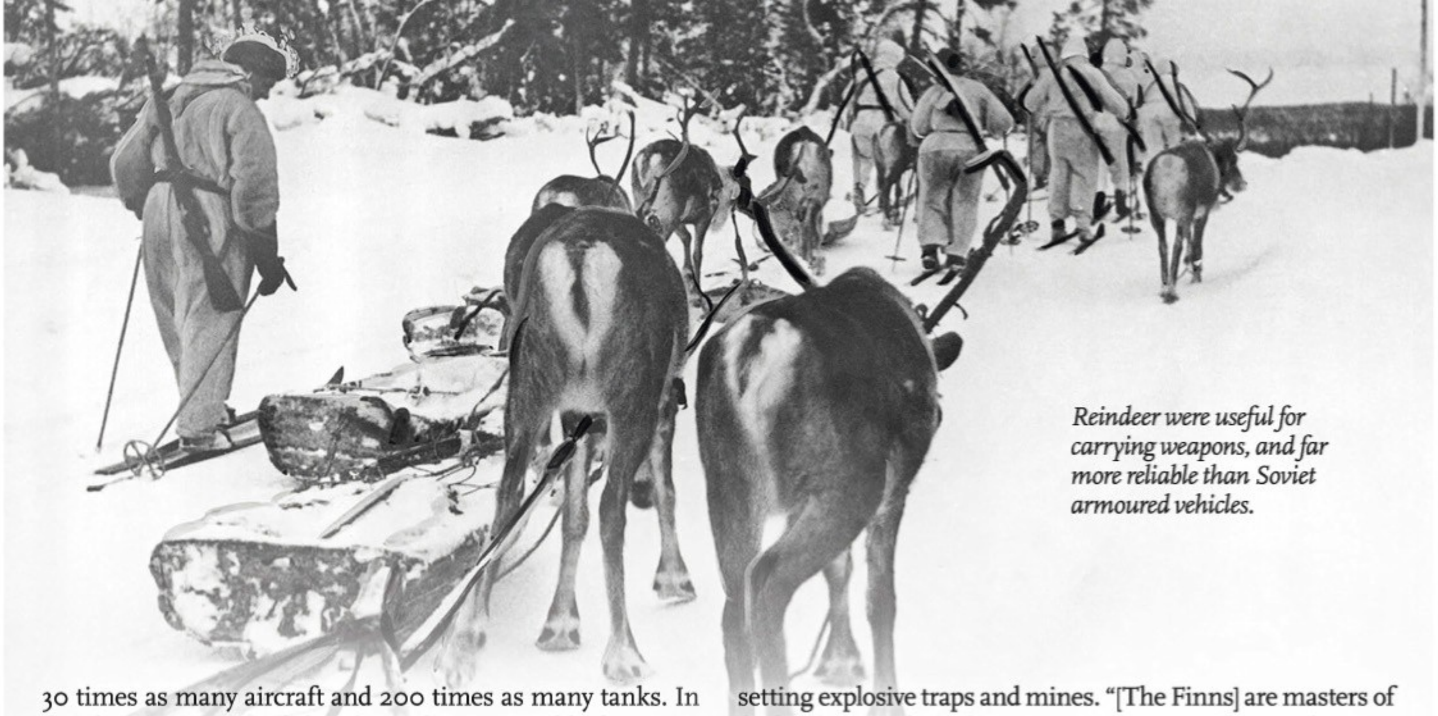
Trousers weren't always provided to mobilised reservists, who had to make do with 'Model Cajander' uniforms, which consisted of their own civilian clothes along with an army-issued utilty belt, hat badge and rifle.

Boots in the infantry were usually made of black leather.

Food bags were handy on a sniper's day-long and often solitary trips.

Skis and poles were in many cases the soldier's own. The vast majority of Finnish men were experienced skiers.

Ski boots were for officers only. Most soldiers tended to wear their ordinary black boots.



Reindeer were useful for carrying weapons, and far more reliable than Soviet armoured vehicles.

30 times as many aircraft and 200 times as many tanks. In fact, he was concerned that the Red Army would advance so quickly that it might forget to stop before it got to Sweden. Over the border, Mannerheim urged his men: “Brave soldiers of Finland! I enter on this task at a time when our hereditary enemy is again attacking our country. Confidence in one’s commander is the first condition for success.”

Confidence was the only thing he had – as a former officer in the Imperial Russian Army, he knew the art of war, but he lacked just about everything else. Most of the Finns’ weapons pre-dated the Russian Revolution in 1917, and they only had enough ammunition to last for a few weeks.

Mannerheim knew that Finland would never be able to win the war. He could only hope to delay the Soviet invasion long enough for the outside world to rush to the Finns’ aid. His first priority, therefore, was to prevent the Red Army crossing the Karelian Isthmus and reaching the capital, Helsinki. He could sacrifice virtually everywhere else.

Red Army advanced

Meretskov’s soldiers made rapid progress. Petsamo, on the Barents Sea, fell on the first day, and the Red Army met no resistance in the northern forests. The mere sight of a Soviet tank scared the Finns. Unhindered, the Soviets advanced.

To the south, on the Karelian Isthmus, the Finns put on a show of resistance, destroying wells, burning houses, and setting explosive traps and mines. “[The Finns] are masters of foul play,” complained a Soviet war correspondent. “When our tired men wanted to drink, they found all the village wells filled with earth. Our enemies are perfidious [and] cowardly… Hardly had the first Red fighter set foot on Finnish soil when an explosion rent the air. Mines are everywhere.”

NAME **GUSTAF MANNERHEIM**

TITLE **FIELD MARSHAL**

1867-1951

Finland’s best man

Finnish-Swedish aristocrat Gustaf Mannerheim made a career as a young man in the Imperial Russian Army, when Finland was part of Russia. In 1917, he left home and lead Finland’s struggle for freedom. Mannerheim was about to retire when the Winter War broke out, but stayed to lead the defence. He also managed a brief stint as the country’s president.

- **Appointed field marshal in 1933.**
- **President of Finland 1944-46.**

It took a week to cover the 30 kilometres to the main defensive position, the Mannerheim Line, which acted as a barrier across the Karelian Isthmus. Here, the offensive stalled in the face of dogged Finn resistance.

Action gave confidence

Mannerheim’s tactics worked, but a week’s retreat had worn away the forces’ morale. And Mannerheim was annoyed that the soldiers in the north were giving up so quickly. In order to strengthen his defence, he ordered action against the Soviet forces at Tolvajärvi, north of Lake Ladoga.

Under cover of night, 140 Finnish soldiers skied to a Soviet camp. The Soviets had lit huge bonfires to keep warm – and thus were perfectly lit targets. The Finns spread out on the crest of a hill. Without a sound, they slipped down through the camp, killed everyone. The attack spooked others in the Soviet camps, who began to shoot wildly in the dark. Very soon, the Soviet soldiers were fighting one another, while the Finns snuck away as invisibly as they’d arrived.

It was a total victory. Tolvajärvi convinced the Finns that they could easily take on the fight against their mighty enemy when they used their experience of surviving in the Finnish landscape to their advantage.

Army equipped for wrong war

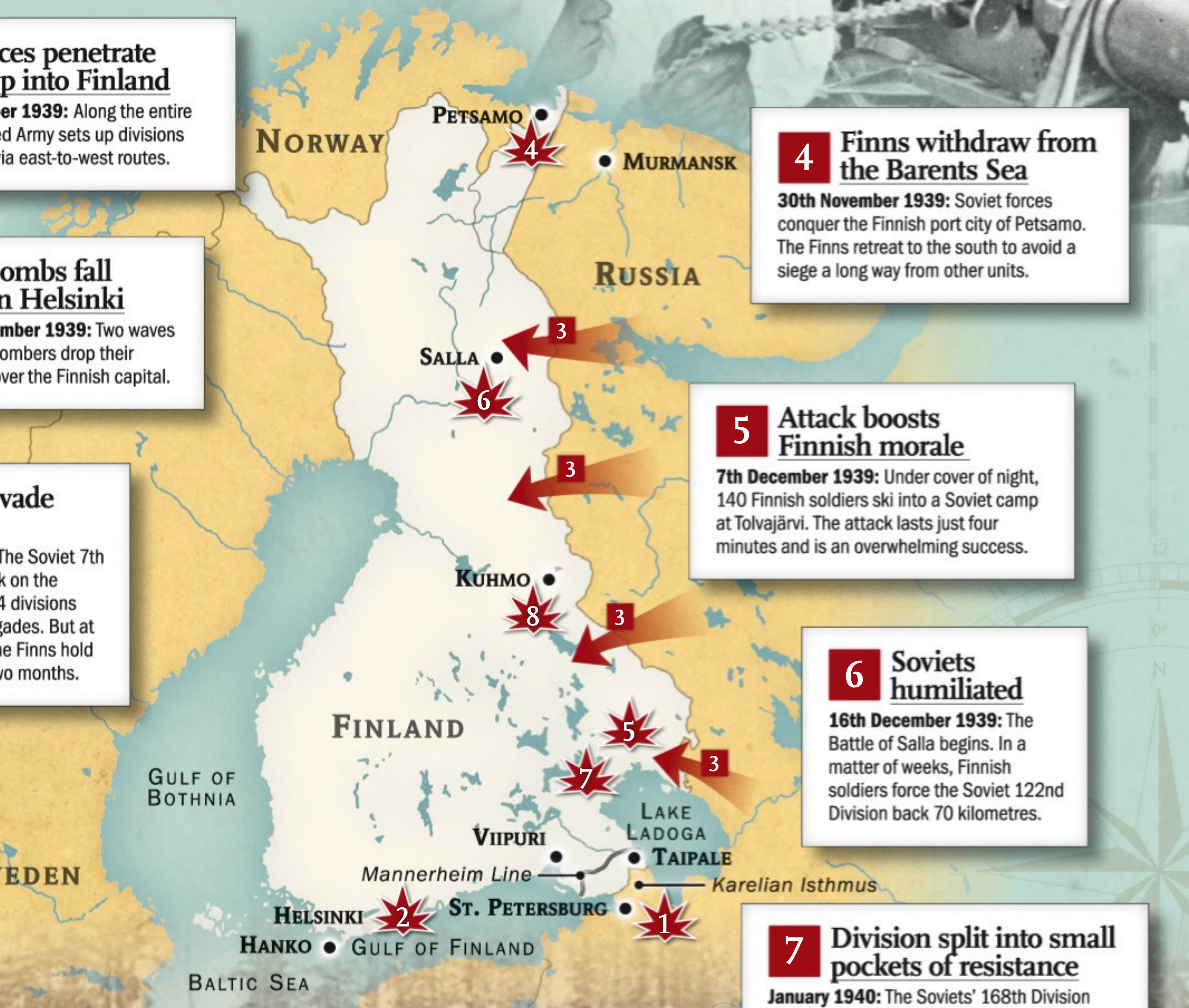
The Soviets underestimated nature as an adversary. The soldiers had been sent out in the subarctic winter in olive-green summer uniforms, which provided neither warmth nor camouflage.

Few soldiers had winter boots, and hardly anyone could ski, which meant the Soviets and their heavy equipment were unable to move through the forests, where the snow was deep. Instead, the soldiers had stick to the roads, transforming the army into slow-moving columns, which were 20, 30 or 40 km long.

The Finnish soldiers, in their white overalls, could ski right up to the columns,

105 days of battle in deep snow and biting cold

The outcome of the war seemed certain: a huge and well-equipped Soviet army against poorly armed Finns. But the cold and local knowledge played crucial roles.



1 Soviets invade Isthmus

30th November 1939: The Soviet 7th Army launches an attack on the Karelian Isthmus with 14 divisions and three armoured brigades. But at the Mannerheim Line, the Finns hold back the offensive for two months.

2 Bombs fall on Helsinki

30th November 1939: Two waves of Soviet bombers drop their payloads over the Finnish capital.

3 Forces penetrate deep into Finland

30th November 1939: Along the entire border, the Red Army sets up divisions that move in via east-to-west routes.

4 Finns withdraw from the Barents Sea

30th November 1939: Soviet forces conquer the Finnish port city of Petsamo. The Finns retreat to the south to avoid a siege a long way from other units.

5 Attack boosts Finnish morale

7th December 1939: Under cover of night, 140 Finnish soldiers ski into a Soviet camp at Tolvajärvi. The attack lasts just four minutes and is an overwhelming success.

6 Soviets humiliated

16th December 1939: The Battle of Salla begins. In a matter of weeks, Finnish soldiers force the Soviet 122nd Division back 70 kilometres.

7 Division split into small pockets of resistance

January 1940: The Soviets' 168th Division goes north around Lake Ladoga to reach the Mannerheim Line from behind. But the Finns resist the attack by splitting the division into 11 small pockets, which are gradually defeated.

8 The Red Army is captured at Kuhmo

28th January 1940: Finnish border soldiers surround the Soviet 54th Division and divide it into three groups. Until the ceasefire in March, the Soviets are forced to survive on air-dropped supplies.

The poorly provisioned Finnish army picked up lots of military equipment left behind by Soviet soldiers on the battlefield.

SOVIET ARMY

SOLDIERS: 425,000 men
- *In February 1940, the figure hit 998,000 soldiers.*
- ✝ *At least 250,000 killed.*

TANKS: 6,500

AIRCRAFT: 3,880

ARMY OF FINLAND

SOLDIERS: 180,000 men
- *Of those, 130,000 stood at the Mannerheim Line.*
- ✝ *26,000 soldiers were killed.*

TANKS: 32

AIRCRAFT: 114

The Finnish soldiers wore white suits, which made them almost invisible in the snow.

sneak between trucks and tanks, launch grenades or Molotov cocktails, and be gone within seconds. A column could be halted by a few felled trees – and if tanks at the front were set on fire, the column was paralysed for hours.

Meretskov's offensive was hampered in most of Finland because his troops were equipped for a different type of war – a lightning war in open, central-European terrain.

Finns wiped out two divisions

It was worse for the Soviet 44th and 163rd Divisions, which were crossing Finland. The goal was the Gulf of Bothnia. If the attackers could reach that far, they'd be able to cut the country in half and block the Finnish border with Sweden.

Another decisive battle began, and Mannerheim had to rely on the resourceful colonel Hjalmar Siilasvuo, who was in command of 17,000 well-armed Finnish soldiers.

Before the 163rd reached the logging town of Suomussalmi, the Finns burned down the houses. Then they blocked all the roads out of town, so the division was trapped and siege warfare could ensue.

Meanwhile, the 44th Division was approaching Suomussalmi from the south-east with fresh supplies for their trapped comrades. The Finns stopped the division's advance with felled tree trunks and repeated attacks on the flanks of the 40-kilometre column. Then the Finns were left to fight the 163rd.

13 percent of Finland's territory was lost after the surrender in 1940. Over 400,000 Finns were evacuated from areas ceded to the Soviets.

On 28th December, the scattered survivors of the 163rd made their way on foot through the forests to the east. Back in Suomussalmi, lots of Soviet equipment was left behind – tanks, artillery, trucks and ammunition – that Hjalmar Siilasvuo could use to fight the 44th Division.

Simo Häyhä was a small, quiet, tough man from the Finnish forests. As a sniper, he killed 542 Soviets before being wounded himself.

FACTS

WHITE DEATH IN THE FOREST

- Snipers were one of the Finns' most effective weapons against the Soviets.
- The marksmen mainly targeted officers, but other ranks weren't safe either.
- Many snipers were armed with Soviet weapons taken from the battlefield.
- The Soviets called the sniper Simo Häyhä *Belaja Smert* – White Death.

The cold, weary Soviet soldiers had abandoned any thoughts of an offensive. Instead, they spent their waking hours staring into the snow-covered forest, where death lurked in the form of snipers. Again and again, Finnish soldiers on skis swooped along the column. They threw grenades or Molotov cocktails at the tanks and shot at anyone they saw.

The Finns targeted the division's huge field kitchens, which drew attention to their position with their thick clouds of smoke. Kitchen after kitchen was destroyed, and more and more soldiers had to cope with the biting, minus-40-degree cold without hot food.

The Finns succeeded in breaking the long Soviet column up into small pockets of resistance, which they called *motti* – a logger's term for small stacks of firewood that would be chopped up later. Slowly, the *mottis* died from hunger, cold and frequent Finnish attacks.

On 6th January 1940, the situation was so desperate that the commander of the 44th Division told his troops that it was now every man for himself. The result was panic. Fleeing soldiers trampled each other to death, with only 700 men escaping through the woods.

Soldiers were invisible

Historians estimate that more than 25,000 of the 48,000 Soviet soldiers involved in the Battle of Raate Road perished – 30 times as many as the Finns lost. And the fleeing soldiers left behind a huge amount of war booty – 65 tanks, 400 trucks, 6,000 rifles, nearly 300 machine guns and mountains of ammunition. Immediately after their victory, the Finns began questioning the Soviet soldiers who had been captured. Why didn't they try to break out?

"Of course we tried to attack and open the road forward, but it was like banging your head against a wall," a chain-smoking Soviet officer told the Finnish interpreter. "We couldn't see the Finns anywhere. And believe it or not, the first Finns that I personally saw were the two that took me prisoner... We couldn't see them anywhere, yet they were all over the place. If anyone left the camp, he met with certain death."

The inept general of the 44th fled back to the Soviet Union, where he was court martialled. The charge read "the loss of 55 field kitchens". He was found guilty and immediately shot.

Stalin scolded commanders

Among the Soviet leadership, nerves were on edge. The nation was a laughing stock and its sovereignty threatened, as

This medal was given to Finnish soldiers who had participated in the defence of the Karelian Isthmus.

Stalin told his generals: "The authority of the Red Army is the guarantee of the USSR's national security. If we struggle for a long time against such a weak opponent, this will stimulate the anti-Soviet forces of the imperialists."

The Soviet people were being fed propaganda to explain why the invincible Red Army was being humiliated in Finland; the weather and the harsh landscape were just two of the excuses. It was also claimed that the United States had deployed its thousand best pilots and that the Mannerheim Line was even stronger than the famous French Maginot Line at the German border.

The truth was that the Finnish defences, with approximately 100 fortifications of concrete and timber, were quite primitive. The fortifications were so far apart that a massed Soviet tank attack could have passed between them. Meretskov just didn't realise it.

At Christmas, Stalin replaced the useless field marshal with his old friend and veteran of the 1917 revolution, Semyon Timoshenko.

The new commander realised that Meretskov's tactics were wrong. Instead of trying to capture the vast northern Finnish forests, effort should have been concentrated on the Karelian Isthmus – the bridge to Helsinki.

In January, Timoshenko sent almost half a million fresh troops to the area. The Mannerheim Line had to be pulverised. The new tactic was not elegant, but it was effective, particularly as Stalin needed decisive action before France and Britain sent forces to help Finland.

THE STORM BEGAN

On 1st February, hell broke out on the Karelian Isthmus. Hour after hour, Soviet guns shelled the Finnish positions, while bombers darkened the sky above. Over the following days, the deadly fire intensified. The ground was churned up several metres deep, and heavy concrete bunkers shook to their foundations.

Not since the German attack on Verdun in 1916 had the world seen such an intense bombardment. The Finns couldn't put up much of a resistance. Although the enemy positions were obvious, the Finns had limited heavy artillery and its use was rationed. Instead, they had to hide until the enemy was close enough to be defeated with lighter weaponry.

The Finnish soldiers didn't even dare to light bonfires, because the smoke would immediately attract the attention of Soviet artillery. For the first time in the war, the Finns froze and starved. With desperate courage, they held their positions for 12 days. Then the Soviets broke through the Mannerheim Line and were finally able to continue their offensive after a two-and-a-half month delay.

The Finns had to retreat to makeshift defences, hastily erected a few miles to the west, but they didn't last long, and Timoshenko was finally able to take Viipuri (now part of Russia and known as Vyborg).

The last desperate hope of foreign aid was extinguished. The help never came, and Finland was forced to make peace with the Soviets on 12th March 1940. The agreement gave Stalin 57,000 square kilometres of Finnish territory.

"We seem to have won just enough land to bury our dead," a Soviet general dryly noted.

Finland sought revenge

The year after the Winter War, Finland started a new conflict to win back its lost territory in the wake of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union.

WINTER WAR After the 105-day Winter War, Stalin forced Finland to relinquish 13 percent of its land. Among the lost territory was the Karelian Isthmus, including the country's second-largest city, Viipuri, and several large industrial areas. Some areas to the north and small islands were also lost.

26,000	Finnish soldiers died during the Winter War.
250,000	Soviet soldiers lost their lives, many to Finnish snipers.

CONTINUATION WAR Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union enabled Finland to reclaim its lost territories. The so-called Continuation War was successful while Germany was doing well, but in 1944, Finland was forced to make peace.

59,000	Finns died, with the front not advancing at all for long periods.
200,000	Soviets fell, partly because Germany was arming the Finns.

LAPLAND WAR The condition for renewed peace with the Soviets in 1944 was that the borders were pushed back to where they'd been after the Winter War. The Finns also had to fight Germans in the north of the country in the Lapland War.

1,000	Finns had to sacrifice their lives to defeat the Germans.
2,000	Germans perished from September 1944 to April 1945.

After the Winter War, over 400,000 Finns were forced to leave their homes in haste because the areas were to be surrendered to the Soviet Union.

German infantrymen land at Oslo Airport, which was captured by the Nazis early on the morning of 9th April. It later served as a German military base.

1940

9TH APRIL

BATTLE FOR NARVIK

NORWAY FALLS

In 1940, Hitler decided to test the Allies' strength during the invasion of Norway. However, after a month of hard fighting in and around the crucial port city of Narvik, the Germans were ready to admit defeat and retreat home through Sweden, but then the Allies did something unexpected…

Scandinavia 1940

THE STAGE IS SET

The Nazis believe that Britain's sea blockade was one of the reasons Germany lost World War I. Free access to the North Atlantic is crucial if history isn't to repeat itself. Norway seems to be the key: if captured, its fjords could be used for U-boat bases while control of Narvik would secure the iron ore supply from Sweden.

Narvik
NORWAY
Oslo
Copenhagen
DENMARK

On 9th April 1940, the armoured ships *Eidsvold* and *Norge* lay at anchor off Narvik. They were Norway's strongest warships – but also the oldest employed by any of the world's navies.

All at once, a slender, grey vessel slipped out of the darkness. Then another, and more followed. A total of ten state-of-the-art German destroyers sailed across the Ofotfjord towards Narvik, directly opposite the two old armoured colossuses.

The German flagship *Heidkamp* sent a boat across to *Eidsvold*. The Germans were friends, the newcomers claimed. They urged the Norwegians to stand down, but *Eidsvold's* captain, Odd Willoch, wasn't fooled and sent the German party on its way. As the German boat headed back, it sent up a red flare indicating the Norwegians planned to resist.

Willoch knew what was coming next:

"Now we are going to fight, boys," he shouted.

The old armoured ship slowly turned towards the German destroyer, increasing its speed. But before *Eidsvold* could approach ramming speed, three German torpedoes hit the Norwegian ship. Two did little damage, but the third found its mark near the forward magazine, which exploded, tearing the hull apart. *Eidsvold* sank in just 15 seconds. 175 sailors out of the 183 that made up the ship's crew died in the icy water.

The explosion was heard on the armoured ship *Norge*. From the deck, her crew watched unknown ships emerge from the fog, then *Norge* opened fire. None of the shells struck, but two torpedoes from the German destroyer *Arnim* hit *Norge* amidships. One minute later, *Norge* had joined *Eidsvold*, disappearing from the surface with 101 sailors.

With the sinking of the armoured ships, Narvik's naval resistance was over. The commander-in-chief of the city's defence was Colonel Konrad Sundlo – a member of *Nasjonal Samling*, a Nazi-style party in Norway's National Assembly. He dithered for half-an-hour without attacking, which gave the Germans plenty of time to gain control of the port city.

The Germans entered Narvik without a shot being fired, and *Heidkamp's* commander, Friedrich Bonte, was pleased to note that his part in the large-scale operation codenamed

Weserübung was complete: Narvik – the port that was vital for transporting Swedish iron ore to Germany – was secure.

THE ATTACK CAME AS A SURPRISE

In the weeks before Operation Weserübung, rumours of an imminent German attack circulated, but no one had taken them seriously. Even when the largest German naval force ever assembled left northern Germany on the night of 7th April, neither the Scandinavians nor the Allies had any idea what was about to happen. Was it an attack on Iceland? Murmansk? Or just an exercise? The guesses were all way off the mark.

At 04.15 on 9th April, the Germans attacked a number of strategically important cities, port facilities and bridges in Denmark and Norway. The surprise was total. In just four hours, Germany had forced Denmark to surrender and declare itself willing to cooperate with the new occupying power.

The Nazis were hoping for a similar outcome in Norway, but instead of negotiating, King Håkon and his government fled to Oslo and mobilised the army.

"Against whom?"

King Håkon's reaction when he was awakened and informed that Norway was at war.

General Nikolaus von Falkenhorst, the commander of the giant Operation Weserübung, knew that a fight was now unavoidable. Norway had to be taken, valley by valley, until its inhabitants realised the futility of the situation.

The Norwegians defended staunchly, but their options were limited. The soldiers lacked both training and equipment. The country wasn't prepared for an invasion. The troops' only hope was that the Allies would come to Norway's rescue – which, after some disagreement, they were on their way to do.

THE ALLIES PREPARE FOR ACTION

On 14th April, the first British troops landed in the Harstad region, north of Narvik, where they set up a temporary base. The soldiers had no artillery or anti-aircraft guns. Nor were they prepared for the Norwegian conditions, having neither warm clothes, snowshoes nor skis. When the Royal Navy's Admiral of the Fleet Lord Cork went ashore to assess the situation, he sank so deeply into the snow that his men had to pull him out. In his report he wrote:

"I have personally tested [the snow]... and found it easy to sink to one's waist and to make, any progress was exhausting."

Despite the problems, it was decided to try and force a landing at Narvik on 24th April, but the action ended in chaos. On the day of the offensive, a violent blizzard struck. The British battleships fired several salvos, but couldn't see where their shells were landing because of the blinding snow. The British had no choice but to abort the landing – which was just as well as their shells had done little damage to the German positions.

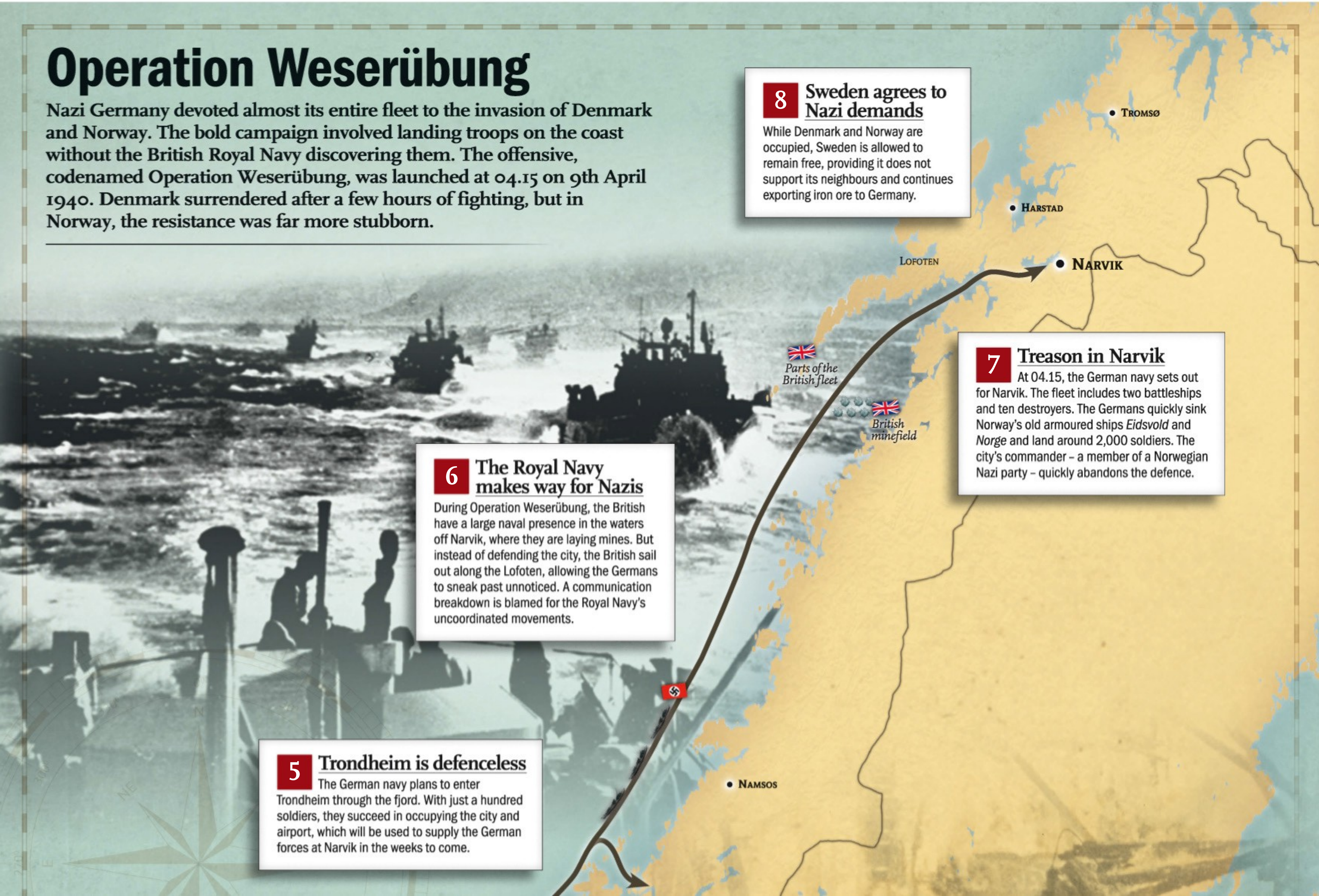
The city residential sector, on the other hand, had been hit square on. Four days after the unsuccessful landing attempt on 24th April, the two British commanders quarrelled about the best way to proceed. Lord Cork, confident in the Royal Navy's strength, wanted to attempt a new frontal assault on Narvik, but Major-General Pierse Joseph Mackesy, the commander of the land forces, was more cautious. He wanted to use the army to surround Narvik. On 28th April, reinforcements finally arrived under the command of French General Antoine Béthouart. He was a World War I veteran and an expert on mountain warfare. With him he had three battalions of eager Alpine troops and two Foreign Legion battalions.

General Béthouart proposed a compromise. According to his plan, the Allies would land their troops at the lightly defended village of Bjerkvik, from where they would move south to attack the German flank at Narvik. At the same time, units of exiled Polish soldiers would converge on the position from the south-west, while Norwegian troops moved in from the north-east. The Royal Navy would

German soldiers shelter behind a Panzer I tank in case they run into a Norwegian-manned machine-gun nest.

Operation Weserübung

Nazi Germany devoted almost its entire fleet to the invasion of Denmark and Norway. The bold campaign involved landing troops on the coast without the British Royal Navy discovering them. The offensive, codenamed Operation Weserübung, was launched at 04.15 on 9th April 1940. Denmark surrendered after a few hours of fighting, but in Norway, the resistance was far more stubborn.



8 Sweden agrees to Nazi demands

While Denmark and Norway are occupied, Sweden is allowed to remain free, providing it does not support its neighbours and continues exporting iron ore to Germany.

7 Treason in Narvik

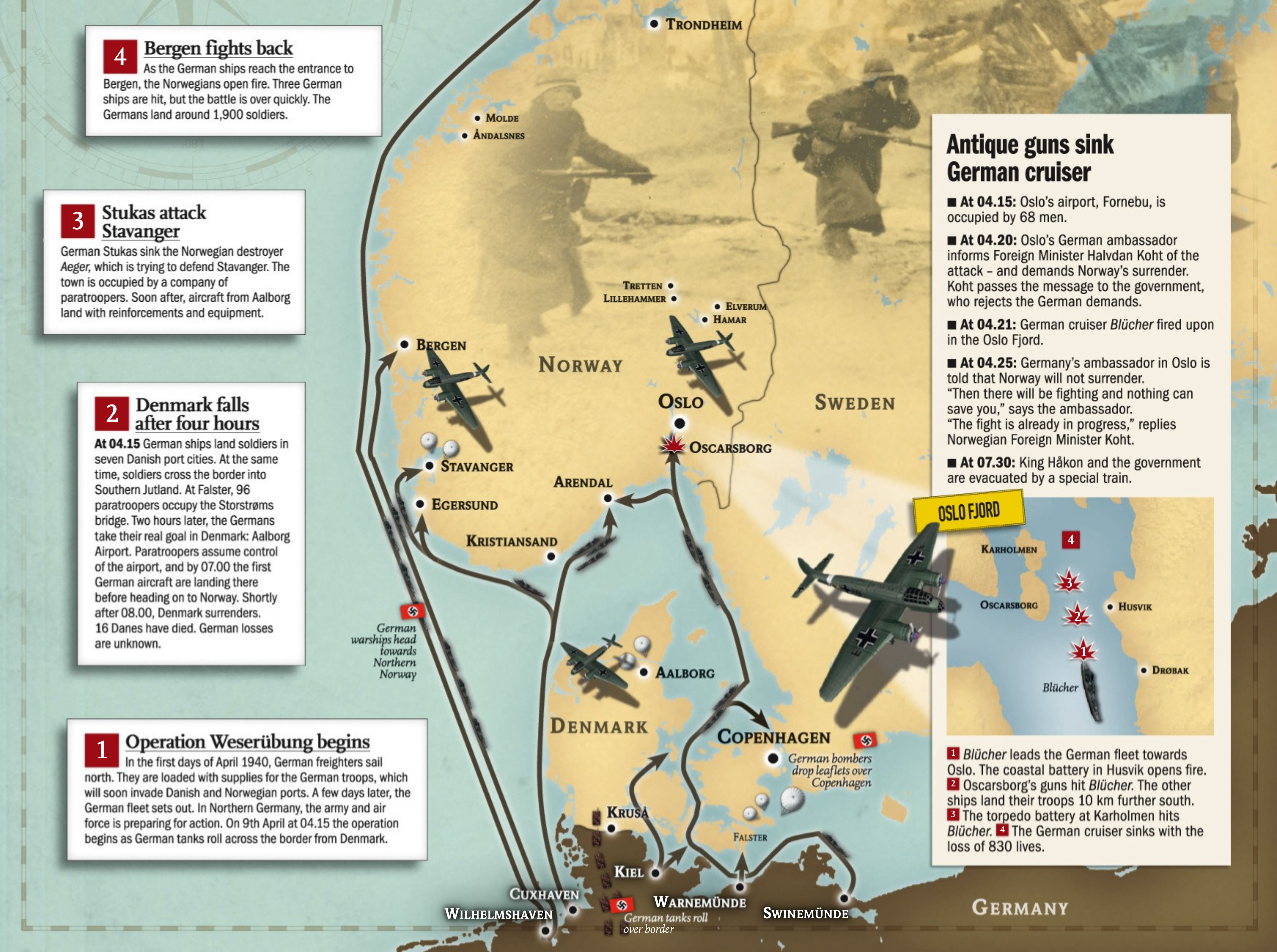
At 04.15, the German navy sets out for Narvik. The fleet includes two battleships and ten destroyers. The Germans quickly sink Norway's old armoured ships *Eidsvold* and *Norge* and land around 2,000 soldiers. The city's commander – a member of a Norwegian Nazi party – quickly abandons the defence.

6 The Royal Navy makes way for Nazis

During Operation Weserübung, the British have a large naval presence in the waters off Narvik, where they are laying mines. But instead of defending the city, the British sail out along the Lofoten, allowing the Germans to sneak past unnoticed. A communication breakdown is blamed for the Royal Navy's uncoordinated movements.

5 Trondheim is defenceless

The German navy plans to enter Trondheim through the fjord. With just a hundred soldiers, they succeed in occupying the city and airport, which will be used to supply the German forces at Narvik in the weeks to come.


Trondheim
Molde
Åndalsnes
Bergen
Norway
Tretten
Lillehammer
Elverum
Hamar
Oslo
Oscarsborg
Sweden
Stavanger
Egersund
Arendal
Kristiansand
German warships head towards Northern Norway
Aalborg
Denmark
Copenhagen
German bombers drop leaflets over Copenhagen
Kruså
Falster
Kiel
Cuxhaven
Wilhelmshaven
Warnemünde
German tanks roll over border
Swinemünde
Germany
Oslo Fjord
Karholmen
Oscarsborg
Husvik
Drøbak
Blücher
1
2
3
4

4 Bergen fights back

As the German ships reach the entrance to Bergen, the Norwegians open fire. Three German ships are hit, but the battle is over quickly. The Germans land around 1,900 soldiers.

3 Stukas attack Stavanger

German Stukas sink the Norwegian destroyer *Aeger*, which is trying to defend Stavanger. The town is occupied by a company of paratroopers. Soon after, aircraft from Aalborg land with reinforcements and equipment.

2 Denmark falls after four hours

At 04.15 German ships land soldiers in seven Danish port cities. At the same time, soldiers cross the border into Southern Jutland. At Falster, 96 paratroopers occupy the Storstrøms bridge. Two hours later, the Germans take their real goal in Denmark: Aalborg Airport. Paratroopers assume control of the airport, and by 07.00 the first German aircraft are landing there before heading on to Norway. Shortly after 08.00, Denmark surrenders. 16 Danes have died. German losses are unknown.

1 Operation Weserübung begins

In the first days of April 1940, German freighters sail north. They are loaded with supplies for the German troops, which will soon invade Danish and Norwegian ports. A few days later, the German fleet sets out. In Northern Germany, the army and air force is preparing for action. On 9th April at 04.15 the operation begins as German tanks roll across the border from Denmark.

Antique guns sink German cruiser

- **At 04.15:** Oslo's airport, Fornebu, is occupied by 68 men.
- **At 04.20:** Oslo's German ambassador informs Foreign Minister Halvdan Koht of the attack – and demands Norway's surrender. Koht passes the message to the government, who rejects the German demands.
- **At 04.21:** German cruiser *Blücher* fired upon in the Oslo Fjord.
- **At 04.25:** Germany's ambassador in Oslo is told that Norway will not surrender. "Then there will be fighting and nothing can save you," says the ambassador. "The fight is already in progress," replies Norwegian Foreign Minister Koht.
- **At 07.30:** King Håkon and the government are evacuated by a special train.

1 *Blücher* leads the German fleet towards Oslo. The coastal battery in Husvik opens fire. 2 Oscarsborg's guns hit *Blücher*. The other ships land their troops 10 km further south. 3 The torpedo battery at Karholmen hits *Blücher*. 4 The German cruiser sinks with the loss of 830 lives.

1883-1942

NAME **CARL GUSTAV FLEISCHER**

TITLE COMMANDER OF THE NORWEGIAN FORCES

Narvik's hero committed suicide

At Narvik, Fleischer became the first Allied general to inflict a real defeat on the Germans. On 7th June 1940, he left the country with King Håkon. When the exiled government appointed a new commander in 1942, Fleischer felt disgraced and took his own life.

- **Critic of Norwegian disarmament.**
- **Side-lined by the exiled government.**

1898-1945

NAME **JOSEF TERBOVEN**

TITLE REICH COMMISSIONER IN NORWAY

Hitler's bully in Norway

During the occupation, Josef Terboven terrorised the Norwegians, instigating Jewish persecution, issuing death sentences against suspected saboteurs and ordering vengeful mass shootings. He was despised by the people, and barely less so by the German military, but as he was answerable only to Hitler, he was untouchable.

- **Committed Nazi.**
- **Blew himself up in May 1945.**

bombard the Germans at Narvik directly. Both British commanders approved the plan and preparations for the Battle of Narvik began.

THE WAR RAGED IN THE MOUNTAINS

Further inland, around 10,000 Norwegian soldiers were attempting to hold back the German invaders, but every day, the Germans received new supplies from the air, helping them to capture large areas to the north and east of Narvik.

On 16th April, the Germans attacked the Norwegian positions at Bjørnfjell, near the Swedish border. Their goal was to secure the Malmbanen railway, which carried iron ore from Sweden. The Norwegians held them for a few hours, but when the Germans attacked with a 20-mm, rapid-fire gun, the Norwegian defence collapsed and Bjørnfjell was lost.

The Norwegians were exhausted and also suffered from a lack of training, heavy equipment and air support, but adversity soon hardened them. Under the leadership of General Carl Gustav Fleischer, they began to become accustomed to the soldier's life and learned to take advantage of being on home ground, using their local knowledge and skills to great effect. Soon, the Norwegians were able to match the highly trained German Alpine troops, and by the beginning of May they began to slowly advance towards Narvik. The Germans resisted, but the Norwegians cleared them from every mountain top.

On 7th May, the Norwegian soldiers captured the strategically important Hill 856. From there, they could look down to the Ofotfjord. And in the distance, lights flashed from a city: Narvik.

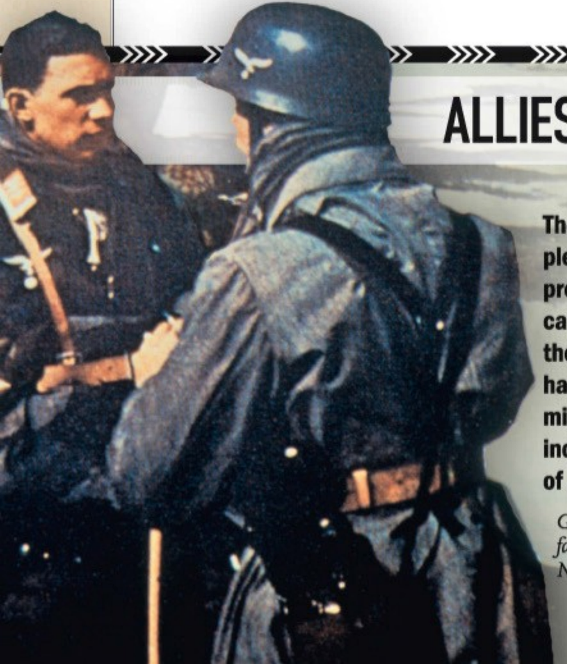
BJERKVIK DROWNS IN BLOOD

Just before midnight on 12th May, General Béthouart was standing on the deck of the cruiser *HMS Effingham*. Together with 14 other ships, the vessel glided over the quiet Beis Fjord. In the light of the late evening sun, the Frenchman watched four landing craft with nearly 500 men from the Foreign Legion approach the town of Bjerkvik. Once the vessels were close to land, Béthouart gave the order to open fire: "Tiré!" The shockwave from the gun's firing ripped the cigarette out of his mouth. A few seconds later, the shells crashed into Bjerkvik. One of the first buildings to be hit was the church. The Germans had been using it as an ammunition store, and the building exploded in flames. The fire spread quickly to the wooden houses, which were located throughout Bjerkvik.

The Legionnaires stormed ashore. The soldiers' briefing had claimed that the town was empty of civilians, but as Corporal Charles Favrel discovered, that wasn't true:

"A frightful butchery ensued, in the course of which we slaughtered more civilians than Germans. Machine guns riddled the doors and windows... then the infantrymen rushed forward hurling grenades... With rifle in hand, I was to scour a dreadful Calvary strewn with mangled corpses,

ALLIES COULD HAVE WON



The Allies were given plenty of chances to prevent Germany's capture of Norway, but their efforts were hampered by mismanagement, indecision and a lack of heavy equipment.

German invasion forces faced strong resistance in Northern Norway.

FIVE MONTHS OF BATTLES

1940

16TH FEBRUARY
Brits storm German tanker
British board German ship *Altmark* in Norwegian waters. Around 300 British prisoners are rescued. Hitler loses faith in Norwegian neutrality.

29TH FEBRUARY
Operation Weserübung
German General Nikolaus von Falkenhorst presents his plan for the invasion of Denmark and Norway. Hitler approves the plan, Operation Weserübung, the following day.

10TH APRIL
First naval battle
During Operation Weserübung, Germany sends half its destroyers to Narvik. Before sailing home, the British Royal Navy enters the harbour and sinks several of them.

11TH APRIL
Germans take more
General Falkenhorst receives

The Germans destroyed the port of Narvik on 28th May, while the Allies blasted the ore-carrying Malmbanen railway line just before they evacuated on 7th June.

cradles overturned on dead babies, and the wounded moaning in pools of blood."

Béthouart sent the Foreign Legion's motorcycle troops south at high speed. From the west, Polish troops advanced and two British destroyers were ready with artillery support. But it all proved unnecessary. The German troops had fled from the inferno in Bjerkvik, and the Legionaries were able to reach Øyjord, the gateway to Narvik, without meeting any resistance. Narvik was now surrounded.

> **"Give something up as lost only when it is lost"**
>
> General Alfred Jodl's response when Hitler revealed he was ready to cede Narvik.

CHURCHILL BACKS OFF

On the 15th May, Britain's newly appointed prime minister, Winston Churchill, was woken by a phone call. As he lifted the receiver, he heard the French prime minister, Paul Reynaud, on the other end: "We have been defeated," the Frenchman said, strain obvious in his voice. When Churchill didn't reply, he continued. "We are beaten; we have lost the battle."

Five days earlier, Germany had launched Hitler's long-planned lightning attack on the Netherlands, Belgium and France. The border had been crossed by 157 armoured divisions and it seemed that nothing could stop the German advance. The Allies were on the run across the entire front, and all of a sudden, the distant battle for Narvik, was no longer a priority for the Allies.

On 23rd May, the War Cabinet in London discussed a report from the Chiefs of Staff. It recommended that Narvik be captured, and then immediately evacuated. The Allies feared taking heavy losses if the Germans discovered they were withdrawing, so they planned to use the assault on Narvik to cover their escape.

The next day in Norway, Lord Cork received his orders. They stressed that the withdrawal must be kept secret from the Norwegians at all costs. The British thought the Norwegians might immediately surrender if they learned of the Allies new objective. If that happened, the Allies would lose their rearguard for the retreat.

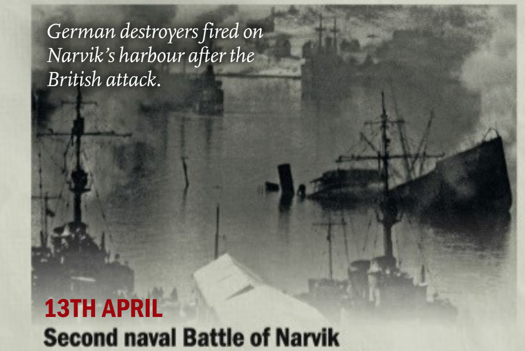
"The worst of it all is the need for lying to all and sundry in order to preserve secrecy. The situation

reinforcements and begins to occupy the area around the Oslo Fjord. He then sends troops to the cities of Lillehammer and Trondheim.

12TH APRIL

Faroe Islands occupied

British troops occupy the Danish Faroe Islands to prevent the Germans from setting up a naval base there.



German destroyers fired on Narvik's harbour after the British attack.

13TH APRIL

Second naval Battle of Narvik

The Royal Navy returns and sinks the remainder of the ten German destroyers. In Narvik, 2,000 German soldiers fear the British will try to occupy the city.

14TH APRIL

Hitler is ready to withdraw

During a meeting with his general staff, Hitler suggests that the Germans abandon Narvik. One of Hitler's closest advisers manages to persuade him to hold on.

14TH APRIL

Allies land soldiers

The first Allied soldiers are landed at Harstad in Northern Norway. They are part of Rupert Force, whose objective is to take back Narvik.

16TH APRIL

British move towards Trondheim

Allied soldiers from Maurice Force go ashore at Namsos. Their goal is to free Trondheim, but much of their equipment hasn't arrived. After a week, the corps is forced to give up its mission and return.

18TH APRIL

Allied landing in Åndalsnes

Primrose Force arrives at Åndalsnes and takes the train to Dombås. Together with Maurice Force, its goal is to free Trondheim, but German resistance proves too strong.

FOR LITTER
NAZIS BOMB TOWNS IN NORWAY
THE STAR
NORWAY AT WAR WITH GERMANY
& NORWAY INVADED
EVENING NEWS

A British newspaper seller announces the German invasion of Norway on 9th April 1940.

vis-a-vis the Norwegians is particularly difficult and one feels a most despicable creature in pretending that we are going on fighting, when we are going to quit at once," British General Auchinleck wrote.

The Germans leave Narvik

The final assault on Narvik began at midnight on 28th May. It was vital that the first soldiers landed in Narvik unseen so that a bridgehead could be established. The crossing took place in silence. Only once the vessels were close to shore was a red flare launched to signal the start of the Royal Navy's bombardment of the German positions. At first, the British soldiers advanced easily, but the situation soon changed.

Two of the attackers' tanks got stuck in mud on the beach. Norwegian and French troops became mixed up in the chaos of battle and all met with strong resistance. One group of German soldiers entrenched themselves in a tunnel, which was only cleared when Legionaries positioned a gun at the tunnel's mouth and opened fire.

Eventually Narvik's German commander, Major Haussel, had only 400 men left. After just over seven hours of fighting – at 06.50 on 28th May – Haussel ordered a retreat from Narvik; the Allied soldiers arrived in the afternoon.

"Everyone lined the streets and cheered and we waved little French, English and Polish flags that the women had secretly sewn during the German occupation", the city's mayor recalled

After Narvik's fall, it seemed only a matter of time before the Nazis were pushed out of Northern Norway. They were squeezed into a small area of Bjørnfjell, near the border, and the Norwegian 6th Division was moving ever closer.

The Germans, recognising their impending defeat, had several trains waiting to evacuate their troops. But just as the Norwegians were fighting to clear Bjørnfjell, the Allies began evacuating their forces from the coast. By the time the Norwegians were ready to finish the Germans off, it was already too late. The final storming of Bjørnfjell should have taken place on 8th June, but it never came. The Norwegian government had met for the last time in Norway the day before and decided that the situation was futile.

On 9th June, the last Allied soldiers left Norway. On the same day, the Norwegian troops were ordered to disband to avoid being taken captive The undefeated soldiers swapped their uniforms for civilian clothes. The mood in the ranks was at rock-bottom.

Narvik was in ruins. Stray donkeys wandered around the charred remains. The animals had been left behind when the Allies evacuated the city. Many of them had served with the Foreign Legion in the scorched lands of North Africa. Now they had been abandoned under Norway's midnight sun.

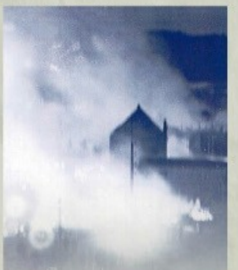
> **"I survived and maintained my position… while all the blame was thrown on poor Mr Chamberlain"**
>
> Winston Churchill on the failed Narvik campaign.

1940

Instead the corps continues by train to Lillehammer to relieve the Norwegians there.

23RD APRIL
Primrose wiped out
Primrose Force has fought through the Gudbrandsdalen, but the soldiers are inexperienced, and at the town of Tretten, the corps is virtually obliterated by the Germans.

28TH APRIL
South Norway lost
The Allies decide to abandon Southern Norway and evacuate its surviving forces. Some soldiers fleeing the battle near Tretten commandeer trucks and drive to the coast. Others sneak across the border to Sweden on foot.



29TH APRIL
The Germans bomb the Molde
The king and his government have to leave Molde. Tromsø is their new HQ.

2ND AND 3RD MAY
Allied evacuation
Stukas attack the remnants of Primrose and Maurice Force as they sail away. A French and a British destroyer are sunk. Southern Norway is in German hands.

10TH MAY
Hitler opens the Western Front
The Nazis invade the Netherlands and Belgium, bypassing the French Maginot line between Germany and France. On the same day, Neville Chamberlain resigns; the new British prime minister is Winston Churchill.

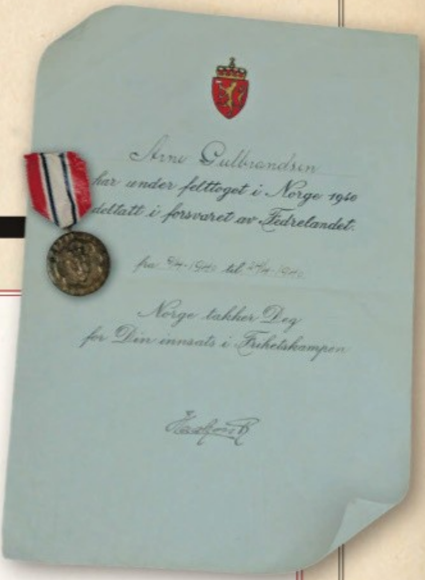
28TH MAY
Narvik is liberated
Troops from Norway, France, Britain and Poland capture the port city of Narvik.

7TH JUNE
Narvik is abandoned
Nazis are ready to cede Northern Norway when suddenly the Allied forces leave Narvik.

9TH JUNE
Norway is lost
Norwegian soldiers lay down their arms. The king and government have already left aboard a British naval vessel.

Norway was treated more harshly than Denmark

While Denmark initially cooperated with the Germans and retained its own government, Norway immediately came under German rule. On the other hand, the Danes began to resist as early as 1941, much earlier than the Norwegians.



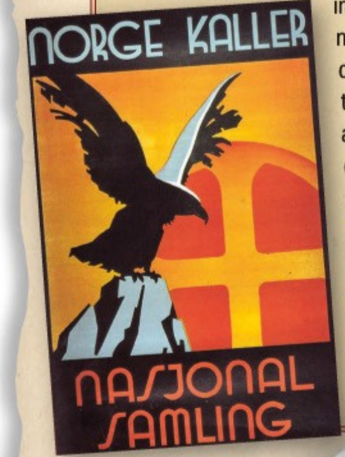
Arne Gulbrandsen
har under felttoget i Norge 1940
deltatt i forsvaret av Fedrelandet.
fra 9/4-1940 til [illegible]/4-1940
Norge takker Deg
for Din innsats i Frihetskampen
Haakon R

Norwegians who defended their country received medals after the war.

Norway was ruled by Nazis

Initially, Norway was ruled by a council under the German ambassador, Curt Bräuer. Then Reich commissioner Josef Terboven took control until 1st February 1942, after which Norwegian Nazi sympathiser Vidkun Quisling led a puppet government.

After 9th April, government continued as normal in Denmark – at least on paper. Although formally classed as independent and neutral, this was conditional on the government agreeing to cooperate fully with the Germans.



Nasjonal Samling was a Norwegian Nazi Party.

Danes cooperated

Throughout the occupation, the Norwegians offered passive resistance. They defied attempts to put Nazis in positions of leadership within their church and cultural life or allow Nazi ideology to become the norm.

Initially, the Danes accepted the German occupation, but that changed when the Nazis were defeated in the Battle of Britain in 1940. The Danes began to show passive resistance and later instigated more open forms of rebellion. By August 1943, popular resistance was so pronounced that the Danish government had to abandon any pretence at cooperation when it refused to sanction the death penalty for acts of sabotage.

Norwegians avoided armed rebellion

The Norwegian government in exile in Britain asked the Norwegians to avoid participating in acts of sabotage or violent resistance for fear that it would provoke even greater oppression. The recommendation was widely followed: apart from the last six months of the war, Norwegian resistance groups practiced only limited sabotage.

Only after 22nd June 1941 did Denmark have a notable resistance movement. When Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union on that day, Danish Communists initiated an armed rebellion. Soon, civic groups also joined the action. Despite their political differences, the various resistance groups cooperated well.

Victims of war

10,262

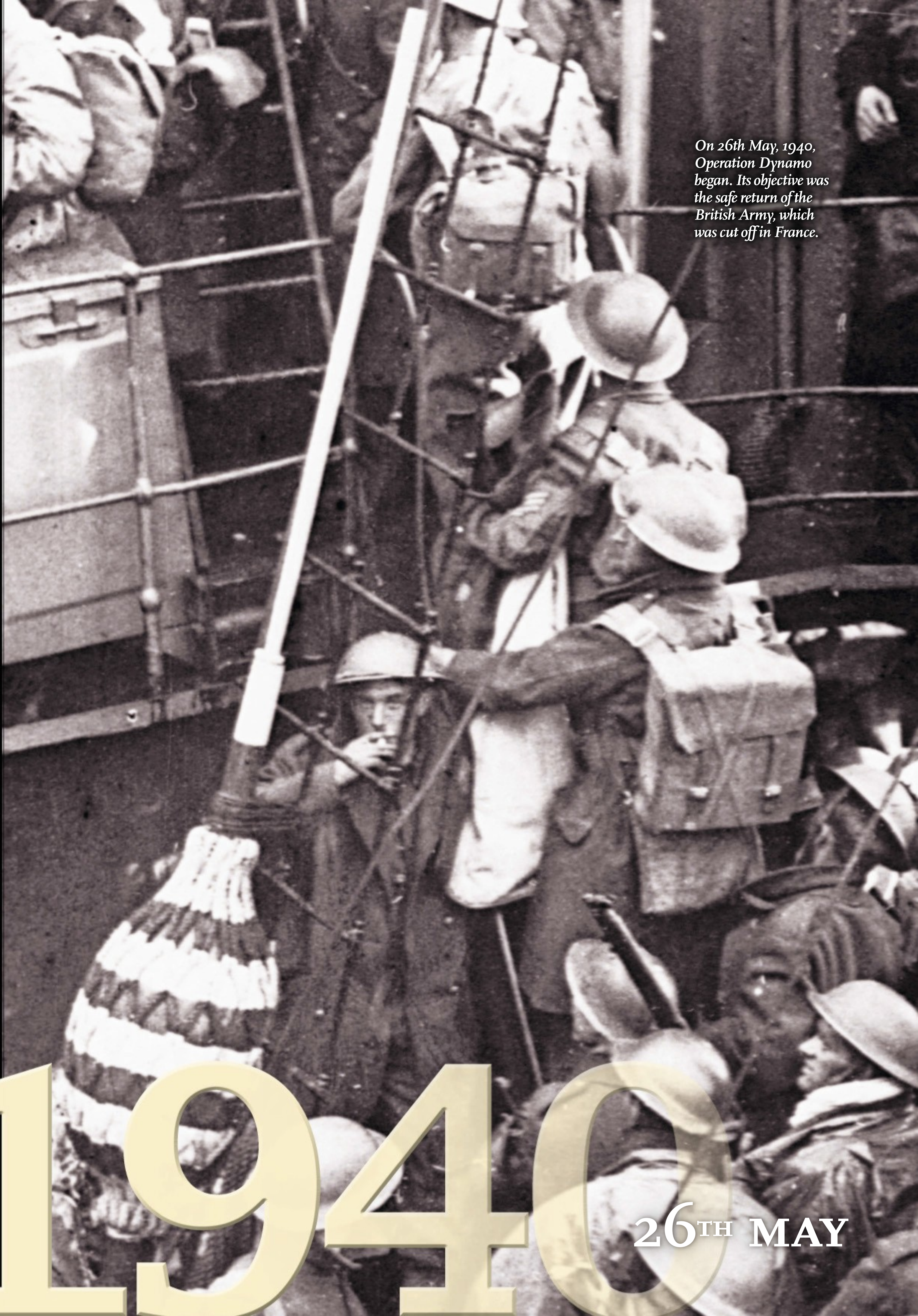
Norwegians perished during the war: 3,638 sailors, c. 2,000 soldiers, 2,091 resistance operatives, c. 1,850 civilians, 689 on the Eastern Front and 610 Jews.

10,433

Danes perished during the war: 2,685 civilians, 2,000 sailors, 600 in camps, 400 German workers, 63 in Allied service and c. 2,000 on the Eastern Front.

Armbands were worn in 1945 by the resistance.

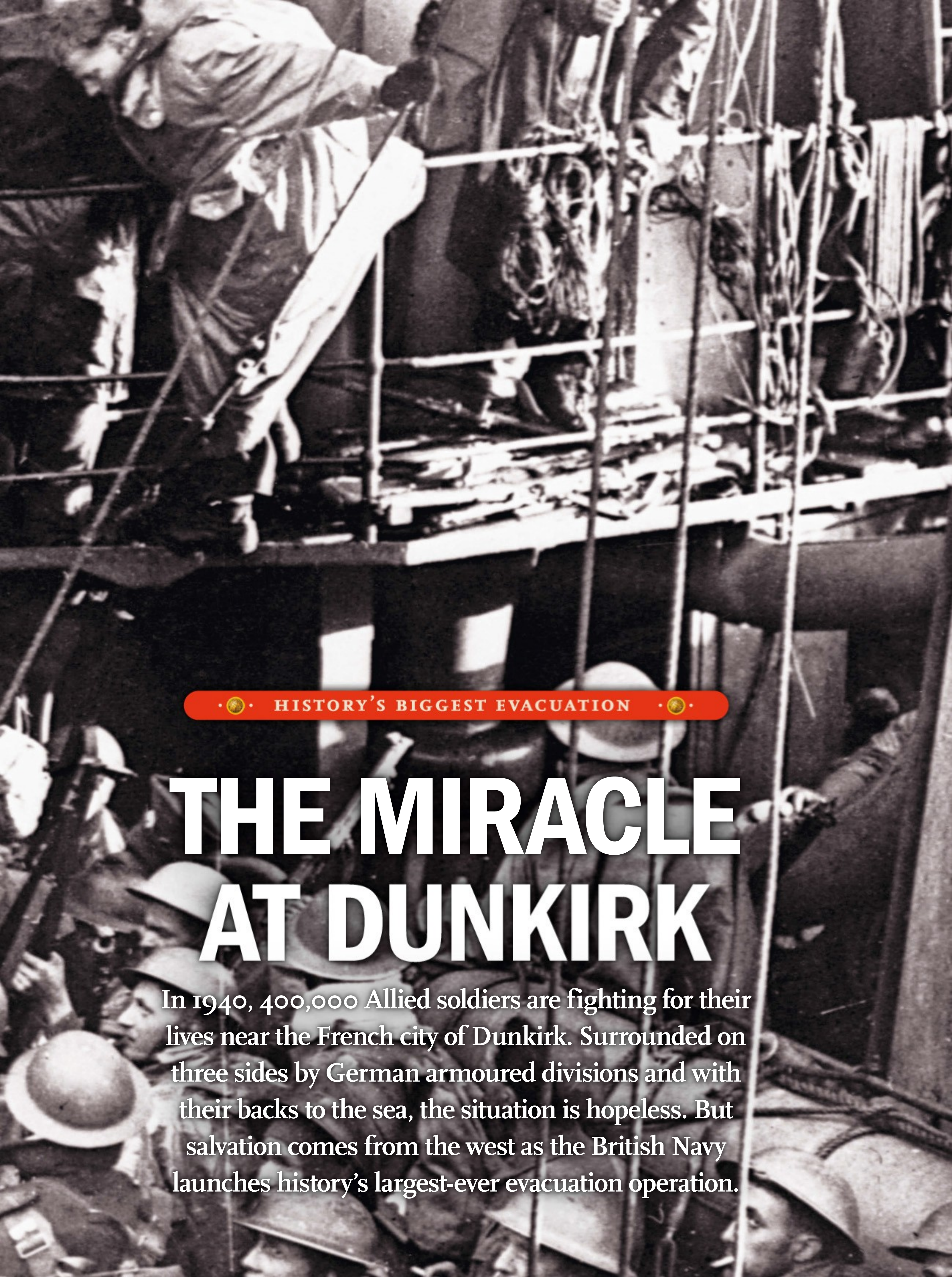
On 11th May 1945, the Norwegian resistance group Milorg took Akershus Fortress from the Germans.



On 26th May, 1940, Operation Dynamo began. Its objective was the safe return of the British Army, which was cut off in France.

1940

26TH MAY



HISTORY'S BIGGEST EVACUATION

THE MIRACLE AT DUNKIRK

In 1940, 400,000 Allied soldiers are fighting for their lives near the French city of Dunkirk. Surrounded on three sides by German armoured divisions and with their backs to the sea, the situation is hopeless. But salvation comes from the west as the British Navy launches history's largest-ever evacuation operation.

THE SCENE IS SET

Dunkirk
FRANCE

On 10th May, 1940, Nazi Germany attacks its western neighbours: Belgium, the Netherlands and France. The British Expeditionary Force has been deployed to the continent in a bid to stop Hitler's fast-moving armoured assault, but within weeks, it is pushed all the way back to the northern French coast, by the city of Dunkirk.

"I heard the Stuka coming down in a vertical dive right on top of me," Gunner Lieutenant James Elliman later wrote about the situation at Dunkirk on 28th May, 1940. "I was by now dulled by hours...of explosions... death aroused no great feeling of fear.... I thought of Margaret in those few seconds of suspense, and she brought me a sort of peace of the spirit. The next moment: Crash! Darkness! And then a vision of falling sand in front of me."

Along with thousands of British and French soldiers, Elliman was huddled behind the wreck of a steamer at the water's edge in a desperate attempt to find shelter from German artillery shells and the Luftwaffe's machine guns.

Eighteen days earlier, German troops had attacked France. Advancing at speed, they'd trapped the bulk of the Allied army on a narrow strip of land bordering the English Channel. Nearly 400,000 men now faced annihilation on the beaches near Dunkirk (Dunkerque to the French).

For Britain, the situation was disastrous: 270,000 of those men belonged to the prestigious British Expeditionary Force.

In an attempt to salvage the situation, Britain's new prime minister, Winston Churchill, sanctioned Operation Dynamo – the evacuation of Allied forces from Dunkirk on 26th May, 1940. The goal was to save as many soldiers as possible from the beaches of Northern France and bring them home to defend the British Isles from a possible German invasion.

ONLY 45,000 SOLDIERS COULD BE RESCUED

Operation Dynamo was a remarkable collaboration between the Royal Navy and the country's civilian population from the

German fighter planes mercilessly attacked the stranded soldiers on the beach at Dunkirk, some of whom tried to return fire – usually in vain.

start. The admiralty had 38 destroyers, which immediately began ferrying rescued soldiers across the Channel. However, the navy's commanders estimated that their ships could only evacuate 45,000 men before the Germans broke through.

When the British public heard about the soldiers' predicament, however, they came together to help their stranded countrymen. Ferry and shipping companies immediately provided 250 large vessels to participate in the evacuation, while patriotic civilians signed up to the venture. By 27th May, more than 850 "Little Ships" – pleasure boats, yachts, launches and fishing boats – were ready to give their all as part of Operation Dynamo.

These small, unarmed ships had shallow drafts and would perform the most dangerous task: they had to cross the English Channel in convoys, then transport the evacuees from the shallow waters of the beaches to the large, armed destroyers lying further out.

WATER WAS AWASH WITH THE FLOATING DEAD

The evacuation got underway on 28th May, when hundreds of ships began crossing the Channel.

The sight that met the civilians at Dunkirk was appalling. The dense smoke from burning oil tanks lay in a thick layer over the jumble of small boats and waiting soldiers, and powerful explosions reverberated all around the port city. The British soldiers had set fire to many of the oil refineries in an attempt to block the Luftwaffe's view of the beach and so earn some respite from the constant airstrikes.

The water's edge was littered with the bodies of the dead and wounded, while the sound of the Germans' endless bombardment drummed across the sky. Soldiers in their hundreds waited in the Channel, with cold water – still only around 12 degrees Celsius in late spring – up to their necks.

SMALL BOATS PICKED UP SOLDIERS

Colin Dick – one of the volunteers – arrived in Dunkirk in a convoy of smaller vessels on 29th May, at around noon. His first order was to sail his motor boat, *Advance*, towards the beach to fetch British soldiers and take them to a nearby destroyer. It was a potentially lethal mission. The air over Dunkirk was alive with German Stuka and Messerschmit, which spewed bullets constantly towards the rescue boats.

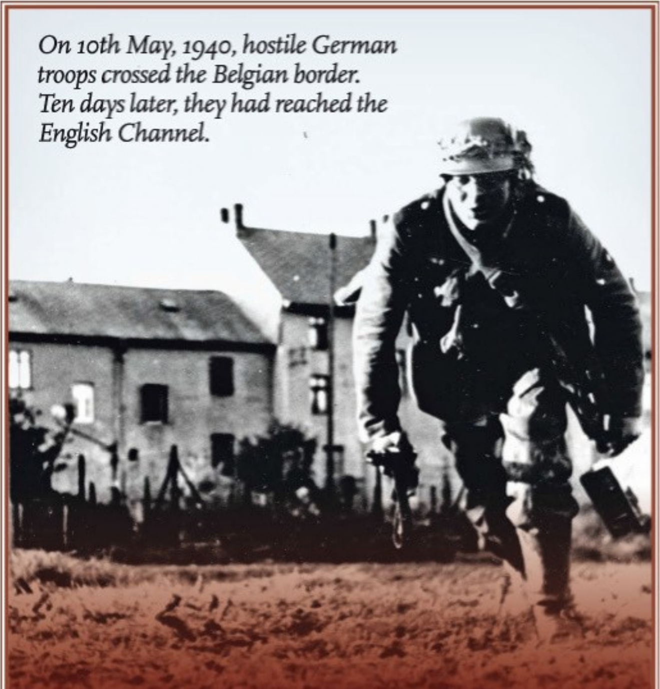
"German dive-bombers were constantly strafing us and everything else in sight.... One of them flew so low over us that it clipped the top of our mast clean off," Dick recalled.

Despite this setback, *Advance* succeeded in tugging an old whaler through the burning oil and twisted hulls towards the waiting lines of soldiers. Each time the whaler was full of exhausted soldiers, Dick tugged it back towards the destroyer.

GERMAN AIRCRAFT SHREDDED THE AIR

After one trip, the soldiers Dick had rescued were scrambling aboard the destroyer when a German aircraft began attacking the destroyer. In an attempt to avoid the assault, the destroyer suddenly lurched forward with a powerful jerk, dislodging some of the soldiers who were still clambering up the nets that had been lowered to the motorboat. Three or four men fell, some being crushed between *Advance* and the destroyer; all but one disappeared beneath the sea's surface, never to be seen again.

Dick went on doggedly making trips to and from the beach throughout the afternoon – though these were often in vain. His companion on the *Advance*, Eric



On 10th May, 1940, hostile German troops crossed the Belgian border. Ten days later, they had reached the English Channel.

Germans stopped a few kilometres from Dunkirk

Hitler ordered the German advance to halt. The pause gave the British time to evacuate.

In May 1940, German armoured divisions rattled through northern France towards the English Channel. They reached the coast on 20th May, trapping the bulk of the Allied forces on a strip of land near the port city of Dunkirk. But they didn't take advantage of the situation to crush their enemy. Instead, Hitler ordered a halt to their lightning advance a few kilometres from Dunkirk.

Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt later described the decision as one of Germany's biggest mistakes. Historians suspect that Hitler believed Britain would sue for peace, rather than face Germany's obviously superior military force.

"We saw our kinsmen literally blown to pieces"

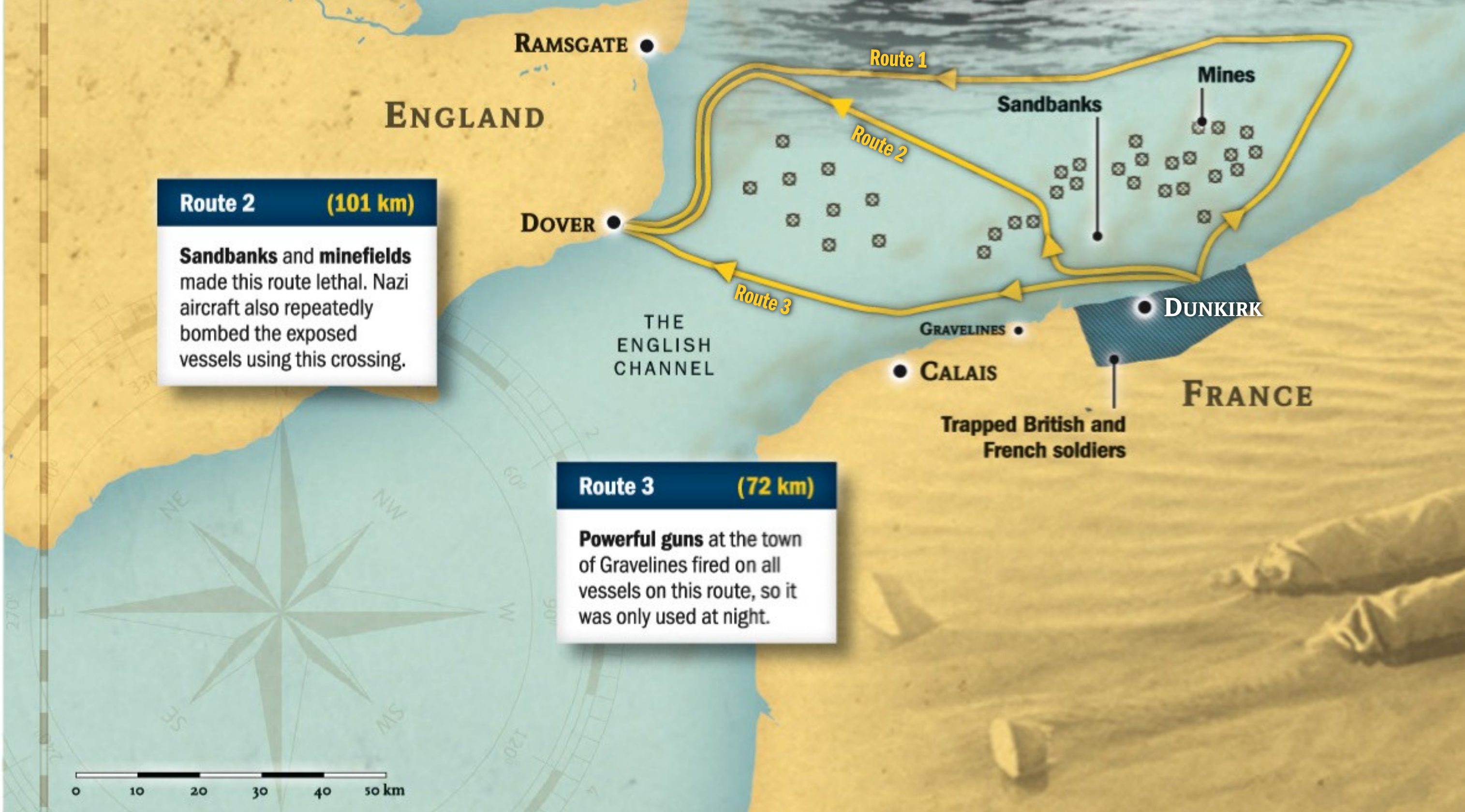
Operation Dynamo saved over 338,000 soldiers

Soldiers in Dunkirk were evacuated via three routes. Minefields, sandbanks, German U-boats and coastal gun positions made the journey perilous for the British ships.

The French destroyer Bourrasque hit a mine and was sunk shortly after by German gun batteries on the coast. Five hundred men perished.

Route 1 **(161 km)**

Vessels that followed the longest route avoided **minefields** and **coastal guns**, but German U-boats made it a hazardous option.


Ramsgate
England
Dover
Route 1
Route 2
Route 3
Sandbanks
Mines
The English Channel
Gravelines
Dunkirk
Calais
France
Trapped British and French soldiers
0
10
20
30
40
50 km

Route 2 **(101 km)**

Sandbanks and **minefields** made this route lethal. Nazi aircraft also repeatedly bombed the exposed vessels using this crossing.

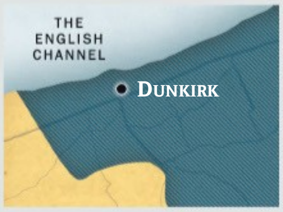
Route 3 **(72 km)**

Powerful guns at the town of Gravelines fired on all vessels on this route, so it was only used at night.

28th May

Evacuation gets underway
Hundreds of ships arrive to pick up the soldiers.

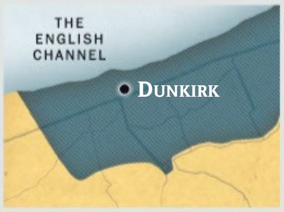
Soldiers at Dunkirk	380,864
Evacuated soldiers	25,473


The English Channel
Dunkirk

31st May

The front line is just 15 km away
The British rearguard struggles to keep the Germans at bay.

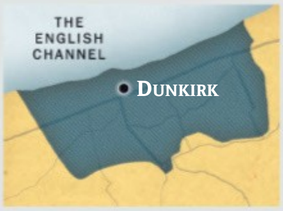
Soldiers at Dunkirk	211,717
Evacuated soldiers	194,620


The English Channel
Dunkirk

1st June

Dunkirk is surrounded
The British rearguard joins the queues on the beach.

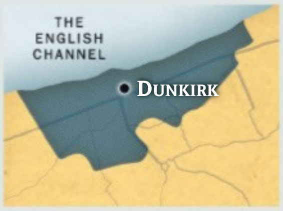
Soldiers at Dunkirk	147,288
Evacuated soldiers	259,049


The English Channel
Dunkirk

2nd June

Allies are forced back to the sea
French soldiers continue to fight while the last British flee by boat.

Soldiers at Dunkirk	121,032
Evacuated soldiers	285,305


The English Channel
Dunkirk

After the war, the city of Dunkirk awarded special medals to the French soldiers who had defended it during the evacuation.

An unknown number of British soldiers, sailors and civilians lost their lives at Dunkirk.

Hamilton-Piercy, later wrote about the horrors they witnessed:

"We saw our kinsmen literally blown to pieces after we had, as we thought, deposited them in safety on the larger ships. We ourselves were deliberately bombed by a plane...and our boat was actually blown out of the water. A number of holes appeared on her starboard side, but fortunately none of us were hit."

Dick and Hamilton-Piercy continued to evacuate a total of 450 men before *Advance,* with water seeping into her hull, fought her way back across the Channel. The boat was too damaged to take any further part in Operation Dynamo.

Ship after ship went down

Not all the vessels were lucky enough to make it back to Britain. Hundreds of sailors were injured and killed in explosions off the French coast. The destroyer *HMS Grenade,* which was tied up at Dunkirk's only navigable pier on 29th May, came under heavy attack by German aircraft. Nineteen-year-old sailor Bob Bloom was in the destroyer's engine room when a Stuka bomber hit the ship with deadly accuracy:

"A bomb went down the ship's forward funnel and exploded. I was thrown up in the air and hit the deckhead. Then I fell back into the blast.... As it hit me, I put my hands up to my face to protect it. It felt as if I had been hit six times on the face with a whip. I was in such pain that I prayed to God to take me."

Bloom survived the attack; the *HMS Grenade* did not. The warship was one of six British and three French destroyers that the Germans sank during the ten days Operation Dynamo lasted; 26 others were damaged beyond repair.

Nine ferries sank along with an unknown number of small boats. The ships that sunk left dead and wounded men bobbing in the sea, while survivors clung to the wreckage. The chaos was total; often men jumped from one sinking ship to be picked up by another, which was then hit in turn.

Traffic delayed the evacuation

While everything was chaos at sea, some form of organisation prevailed on land. The British officers enforced a steely discipline to ensure that the stranded soldiers didn't overwhelm the rescue vessels.

While Colin Dick zigzagged his motor boat among the wreckage, ferrying troops out to sea, Lieutenant Elliman was ordered to bring his 40-man unit to the evacuation zone on the eastern shore.

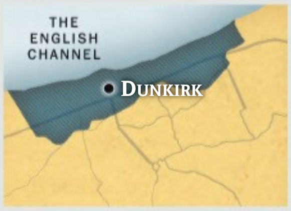
In spite of the army's clear evacuation orders, the small dirt roads around Dunkirk were crowded with British and French troops, as thousands tried to squeeze their way on to a bridge leading to the port at Dunkirk.

The soldiers' only hope was to board one of the small boats before the Germans captured the narrow stretch of land still in Allied hands. The thousands of soldiers

3rd June

The Germans are just 5 km away
The beaches are too dangerous – the last British ships leave.

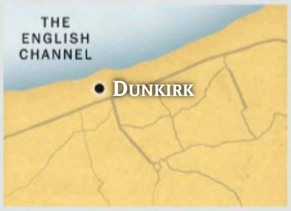
Soldiers at Dunkirk	94,286
Evacuated soldiers	312,051



4th June

The French fight on alone
Around 40,000 French and 28,000 wounded British are left behind.

Soldiers at Dunkirk	68,111
Evacuated soldiers	338,226



■ Trapped British and French soldiers

on the roads stopped all traffic and forced Elliman to leave his Humber truck on the outskirts of Dunkirk, along with all the other abandoned Allied vehicles – many of which had been set alight to prevent them falling into enemy hands.

In the grey daylight, Lieutenant Elliman's soldiers continued on foot towards the last bridge over one of Dunkirk's canals. He recorded the event later:

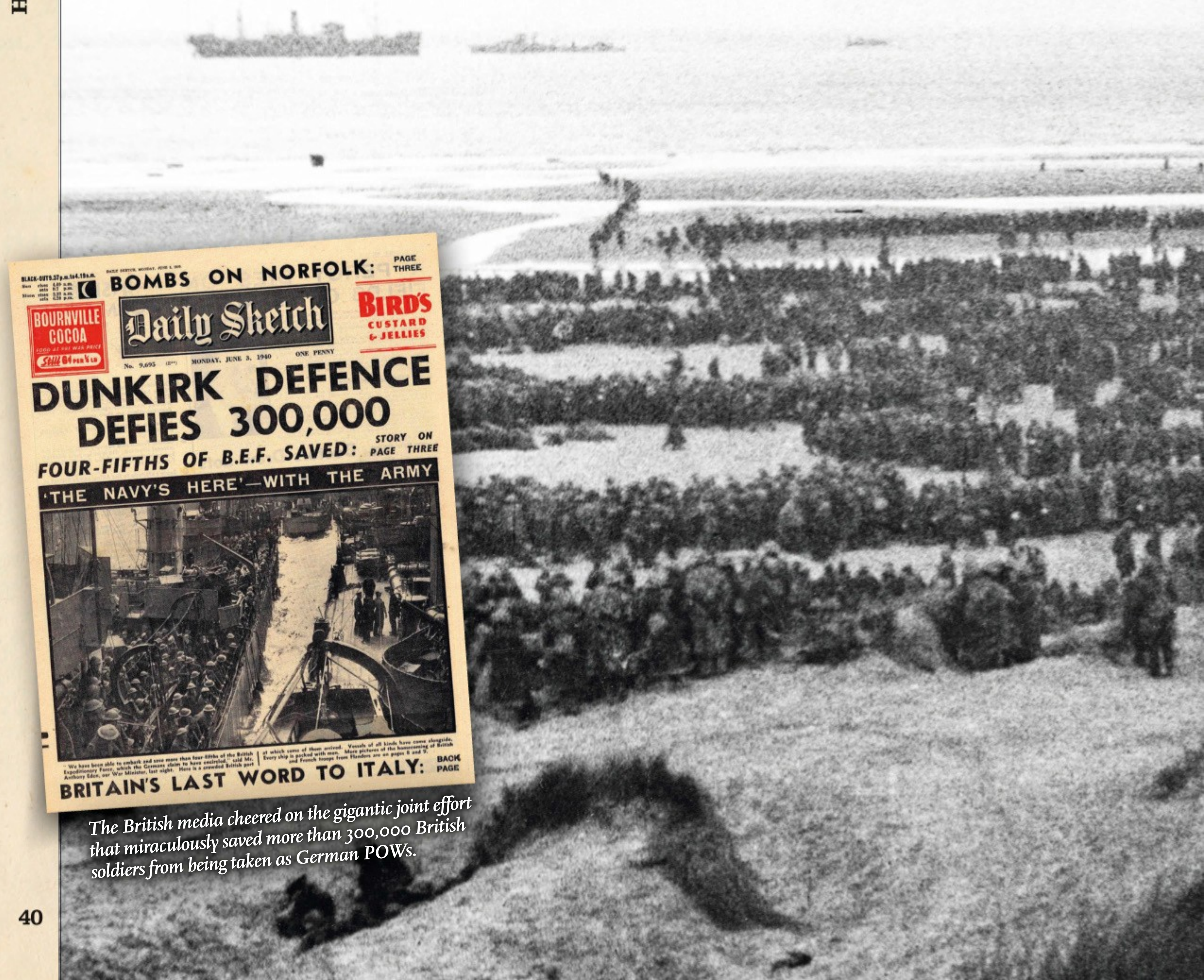
"Suddenly I heard a swish and an explosion. A cloud of smoke and earth was pitched into the air just to the left of the bridge.... A couple of officers climbed down, and swam across the canal. But...I decided to go on to within 50 yards of the bridge, and then sprint across to the other side.... So I dumped my haversack and...we made our dash, and got well into the fields beyond the canal before pausing for breath. Whoof! We'd made it. As I learned later, the enemy scored a direct hit on the bridge five minutes after we crossed it, and just after my last gunner had got across."

KILOMETRE-LONG QUEUES ON THE BEACHES

The smashed bridge divided the Allied troops in two: those who fought against the Germans on the far side of the canal, and those who were temporarily secure. The lucky ones headed for the beaches, which quickly began to fill up. The assembly area was packed with Allied troops standing in kilometre-long lines across the sand and out into the waves. There was no protection from German air strikes.

When Elliman reached the beach, he felt no relief – only anxiety. "The sandy beach was about 100 yards wide. Down

"We failed to move forward…



BOMBS ON NORFOLK: PAGE THREE

BOURNVILLE COCOA FOOD AT THE WAR PRICE Still 6d PER ¼ LB

Daily Sketch

BIRD'S CUSTARD & JELLIES

No. 9,695 MONDAY, JUNE 3, 1940 ONE PENNY

DUNKIRK DEFENCE DEFIES 300,000

FOUR-FIFTHS OF B.E.F. SAVED: STORY ON PAGE THREE

'THE NAVY'S HERE'—WITH THE ARMY

"We have been able to embark and save more than four-fifths of the British Expeditionary Force, which the Germans claim to have encircled," said Mr. Anthony Eden, our War Minister, last night. Here is a crowded British port at which some of them arrived. Every ship is packed with men. Vessels of all kinds have come alongside. More pictures of the homecoming of British and French troops from Flanders are on pages 8 and 9.

BRITAIN'S LAST WORD TO ITALY: BACK PAGE

The British media cheered on the gigantic joint effort that miraculously saved more than 300,000 British soldiers from being taken as German POWs.

the centre stood the line of men, three abreast. The smoke... from the burning oil tanks drifted eastwards over the town," Elliman recalled. "And then it started! A formation of high fliers came up from the west, and dropped stick after stick of bombs.... This first attack...was most unnerving. You felt so completely exposed on the beach."

When the attack stopped, the lieutenant immediately ordered his soldiers back in line. The battle for places on the boats was intense, with new troops constantly pouring down from the dunes.

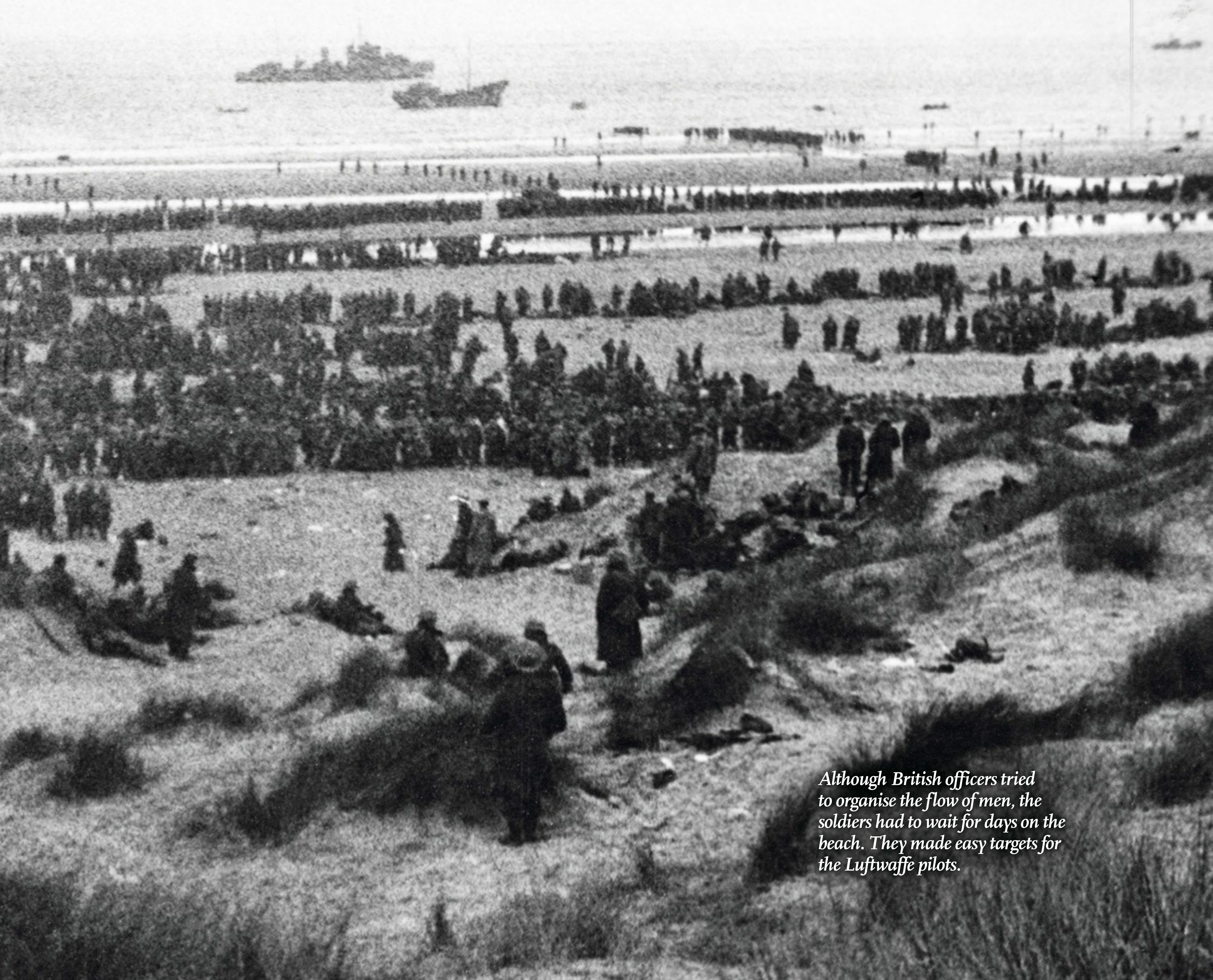
PLANES ATTACKED THE SOLDIERS ON THE BEACH

It was the same story everywhere. Soldiers were marching or standing in the sand. The lucky ones crouched in the dunes, but most had to wait on the beaches or in the waves, while German dive bombers attacked them. Fortunately, the bombs often drilled into the sand before detonating, and the sand absorbed most of the explosion and shrapnel.

After half a day in one of the long queues, Elliman's unit decided to switch to a different line – one leading to the city's only remaining pier. Here, the fleet's larger ships were tied up ready to transport the exhausted troops.

But Elliman's troubles weren't over. There were too many men for too few ships. The lieutenant wrote later how the line didn't move: "We failed to move forward.... Only the wounded were got away that night.... As the hours went by, the spirits of all must have been sinking.... Mine certainly were. Sleep was impossible. It was just

Only the wounded got away"



Although British officers tried to organise the flow of men, the soldiers had to wait for days on the beach. They made easy targets for the Luftwaffe pilots.

"The cries of the wounded were heart-rending"

waiting, waiting, waiting." It wasn't until the next morning – 30th May – that Elliman's unit took a ship out of Dunkirk.

British destroyer sank a fishing boat

Even the lucky ones who made it to the ships waiting offshore were still in danger. While Elliman's unit was still stuck at the pier, a tragedy occurred 30 km into the English Channel.

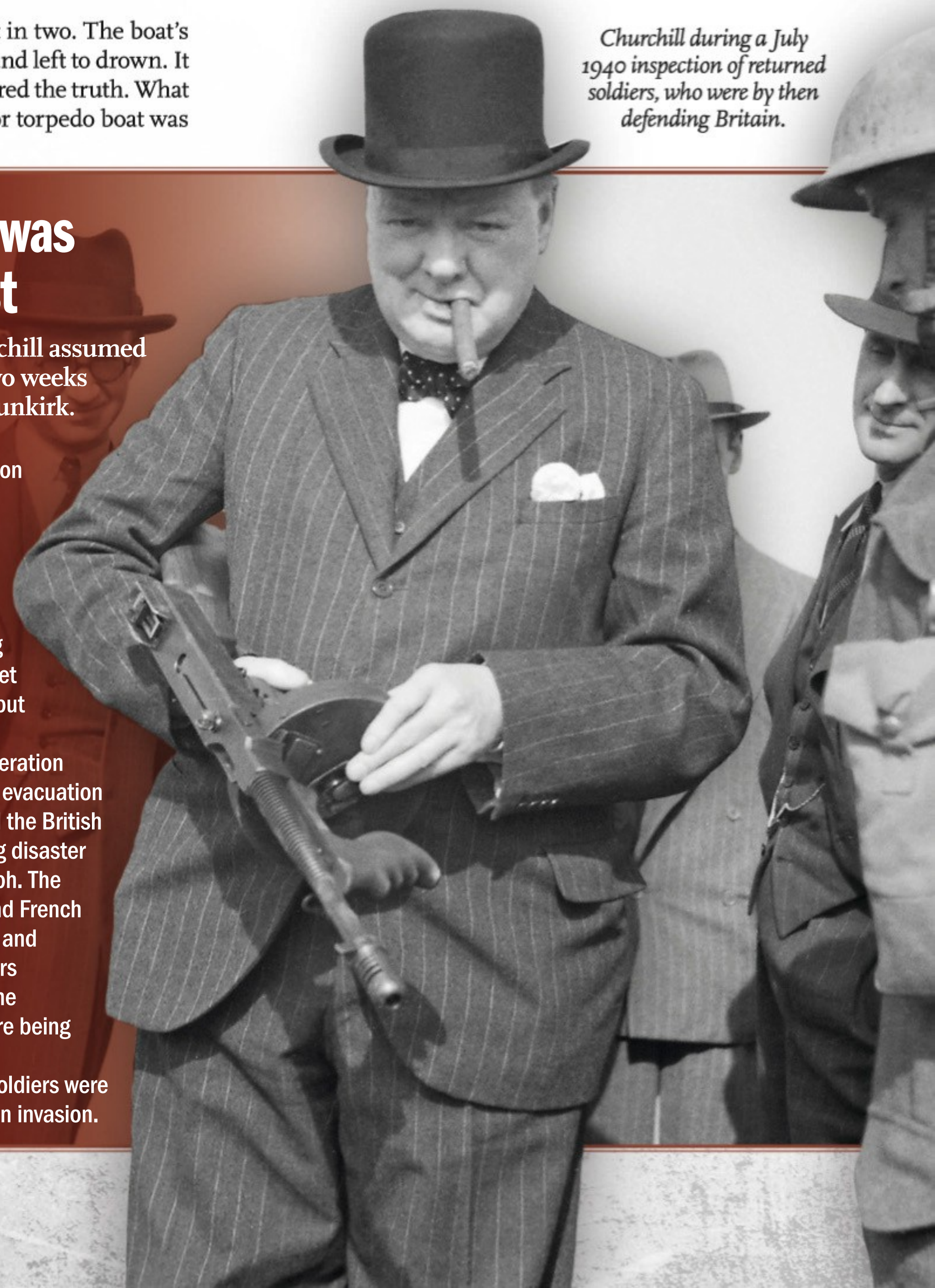
The commander of the minesweeper *HMS Lydd* panicked after a German torpedo boat sank the British destroyer *HMS Wakeful*. The *Lydd's* captain ordered all lights on his ship to be put out, then opened fire on what his crew, struggling to see properly in the dark, mistakenly identified as a German motor torpedo boat.

The *Lydd* rammed the boat and split it in two. The boat's terrified survivors were shot with rifles and left to drown. It was only later that the *Lydd's* crew discovered the truth. What they had supposed to be a German motor torpedo boat was a British fishing boat, *HMS Comfort*, and the Germans they thought they'd shot were British sailors and evacuees, none of whom survived the attack.

Meanwhile, back on land, the Germans were edging ever nearer, and the situation on the narrow beach was becoming increasingly desperate.

Wounded were left to drown

On 1st June, the remnants of the British rearguard arrived at the assembly area to await evacuation. Major Rupert Colvin, one of the last British officers in France, was among them. His report revealed how the dunes and beach were filled with



Churchill during a July 1940 inspection of returned soldiers, who were by then defending Britain.

Operation Dynamo was Churchill's first test

On 10th May, 1940, Winston Churchill assumed the post of prime minister. Only two weeks later, he authorised the rescue at Dunkirk.

Just hours before Nazi Germany's invasion of France in May 1940, Parliament appointed the former First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, as prime minister. Britain's new leader had been a staunch opponent of Hitler and the Nazis from long before the war. On taking up his new office, he famously told cabinet colleagues that he had "nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat".

Churchill himself gave the order for Operation Dynamo and did not hesitate to term the evacuation a miracle. At the same time, civilians and the British press cheered the way in which a looming disaster had been turned into some kind of triumph. The navy's successful rescue of the British and French forces at Dunkirk boosted British morale and ensured that Britain had sufficient soldiers to defend itself and its wider interests. The evacuation also erased any notion of there being peace talks with Nazi Germany.

Upon their return, the majority of the soldiers were deployed to defend Britain from a German invasion.

dead and severely wounded soldiers, who were unable to find shelter from the German artillery bombardment.

For an hour, Colvin and his men carried the helpless men aboard the small boats that were still ferrying troops from the beach. But the Germans' roaming fighter planes eventually made the rescue action so lethal that Colvin had to order his soldiers to retreat. Unlike a few days earlier, when the army had prioritised evacuating the wounded, now they would be left to the Germans and the tide.

British Lieutenant Julian Warde-Aldam described the scene: "The ground was flowing (literally) in blood, and the cries of the wounded, as they clutched at our ankles as we went past, were heart-rending...there was nothing we could do for them."

During 3rd June, the last British soldiers were rescued from Dunkirk. At the same time, around 60,000 French soldiers were still struggling to defend the port city and buy time for the rest to escape across the Channel.

LAST SHIP LEFT DUNKIRK

The next day, the evacuation of the French got under way in earnest and almost 20,000 soldiers were transported to England. But on 4th June, the German field guns were so close that the risk to the "Little Ships" eventually became too great. About 40,000 French soldiers were left to fend for themselves, while their senior officers were evacuated. French general, Robert Barthélemy, reported the scenes when the last ship left Dunkirk.

"About 1,000 men stood to attention four deep about halfway along the pier, the general and his staff [being] about 50 feet away.... After having faced the troops, whose faces were indiscernible in the dawn light, the flames behind them showing up their steel helmets, the officers clicked their heels, saluted, and then turned about, and came down to the boat with me. We left at 03.05."

The boat sailed them out to the French destroyer *Shikari*, which was a few hundred metres from the coast. The warship's deck was filled with French soldiers who could hear the fire fight at the outskirts of the city between their surviving French comrades and the German troops. At 04.00, *Shikari* – the last ship to leave Dunkirk – set sail. Operation Dynamo had successfully evacuated 338,226 men, but 68,111 were left behind – abandoned or dead.

Material loss was huge

The rapid evacuation from Dunkirk forced Allied soldiers to leave most of the army's heavy equipment on the French beaches.

SHIPS A fleet of large and small ships from Britain and its allies took part in the operation, but they didn't all return.

6	British destroyers were sunk during the evacuation.
297	vessels – both military and civilian – were lost.

AIRCRAFT Spitfires and Hurricanes fought to protect the waiting soldiers, as well as ships in the English Channel.

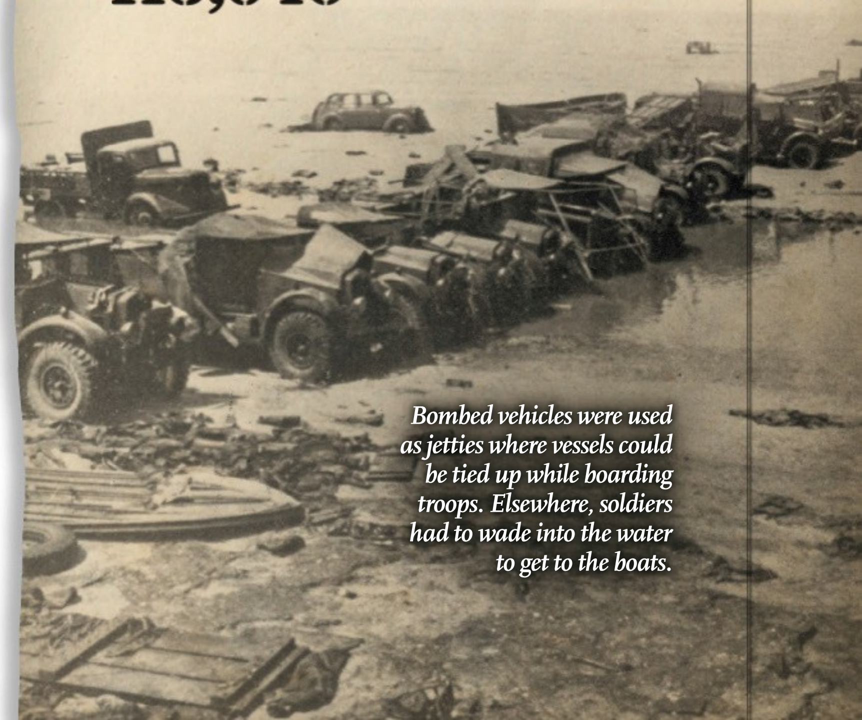
145	RAF planes were destroyed by the Luftwaffe, including 42 Spitfires.

VEHICLES Over 80,000 different vehicles were left behind. Some were destroyed, but many were taken by the Germans.

432	tanks.
20,548	motorcycles.
63,879	other vehicles, including jeeps and trucks.

ARTILLERY AND SUPPLIES Artillery guns as well as many tons of ammunition and fuel were left behind.

2,472	guns of different calibres.
76,097	tons of ammunition.
164,929	tons of fuel.
415,940	tons of supplies.



Bombed vehicles were used as jetties where vessels could be tied up while boarding troops. Elsewhere, soldiers had to wade into the water to get to the boats.

British pilots were always on alert. Spitfires were expected to be in the air ten minutes after German planes appeared on the radar.

1940

10th JULY

BRITISH PILOTS HOLD OFF THE LUFTWAFFE

In the summer of 1940 a battle breaks out that will last for 114 days. First, the Luftwaffe attack merchant ships in the English Channel, then the Germans smash British radar installations and air bases before relentlessly bombing London. But the British "few" are stubborn.

Britain 1940

THE STAGE IS SET

In June 1940, Hitler's blitzkrieg attack crushes France with lightning speed. The Nazis only need to defeat Britain before all of Western Europe is in their grasp. The British stubbornly refuse to surrender, however – not least the Royal Air Force, which proves to be a far more dangerous enemy than the Germans expected.

BRITAIN
London

After a grey and drizzly morning, the sun shone again over Dover's white cliffs on Wednesday, 10th July 1940. The sunbeams sparkled on the water as a convoy of freight ships passed. The vessels looked like small toys placed in an idyllic model landscape. It was a beautiful summer day in southern England.

63 schools trained pilots for the Luftwaffe in 1940. The German air force possessed around 5,000 highly trained pilots who could be sent into the skies over Britain.

But fighter pilot John Thompson did not have time to enjoy the view from his cockpit. His eyes were trained firmly on a formation of German bombers that approached with deadly intent, ready to drop their deadly payload on to the convoy below. While anti-aircraft guns fired from the beach, Thompson took charge of 12 Hurricane fighters, flying directly towards the enemy planes. The two formations approached each other at a combined speed of 900 km/h.

Suddenly the bombers turned and fled. Thompson followed, took aim and fired his aircraft's machine guns. One enemy bomber crashed into the ocean leaving a trail of smoke behind it. From the beach, local residents watched as the combatants swarmed around one another.

The aerial fight was the first significant incident in what would become known as the Battle of Britain. The conflict was history's first major air battle, and the 114-day onslaught would not only allow Britain to maintain air superiority over her own islands, but would also mark a turning point in WWII. Until then, 1940 had seen a heady series of triumphs for the Third Reich. In April, German troops had effortlessly taken Denmark and Norway, and in May, Holland, Belgium and France fell too. The United States had remained neutral and the Soviet Union was willingly cooperating with the Germans. Only Britain now stood in the way of a Europe united under the shadow of the swastika. The only question was how long she could hold out?

British troops had been stationed in France since the war broke out in September 1939, but in the summer of 1940, Hitler's apparently unstoppable army had pushed the British back to the Dunkirk beaches, from where they were evacuated at the last minute before being pushed into the sea. Thousands of weapons and trucks as well as several tonnes of ammunition and fuel were left on the beaches. It was a military disaster for Britain, which was left on the brink of collapse.

"Final victory over England is now only a matter of time," concluded Germany's Chief of Staff Alfred Jodl.

Channel's freight ships were the target

Operation Sea Lion, as the German invasion plan was codenamed, was due to deliver the killer blow. It was based on the Blitzkrieg principle – the combination of infantry, tank and air bombardments that had brought the Germans success throughout Europe. Hitler, however, had no illusions

1893-1946

NAME **HERMANN GÖRING**
TITLE REICH MARSHAL

Airman became supreme commander

An airman from WWI, fighter pilot Hermann Göring was one of Hitler's right-hand men from 1933. Göring created the Gestapo, but left it to Heinrich Himmler in 1935 in favour of a job as commander-in-chief of the Luftwaffe. After the Germans' lightning victory in 1939-40, Göring was made supreme commander of the entire Wehrmacht – a position he kept throughout war. He was also Hitler's deputy.

- **Given Grand Cross of the Iron Cross.**
- **Committed suicide in prison.**

1882-1970

NAME **HUGH DOWDING**
TITLE AIR MARSHAL

War veteran countered Hitler's plan

Hugh Dowding had been a fighter pilot in World War I, and was appointed head of the Royal Air Force in 1936. In addition to managing the RAF at the beginning of World War II, he was also the architect of an integrated air defence system. It included a messaging system whereby radar observations were promptly analysed and passed on to the RAF, which took to the air as soon as an observation was verified as a genuine attack.

- **Retired from the RAF in 1942.**
- **Was made a baron in 1943.**

The Royal Air Force was established in 1918 as an independent unit and is the world's oldest air force.

about the task ahead. Since the battle of Hastings in 1066, no one had managed to cross the Channel and invade Britain. He had to get rid of the Royal Air Force (RAF), otherwise his fleet and army would be unable to land on British soil.

The Nazis transferred bombers and fighters to newly built bases in northern France and began bombing ships in the English Channel. The Germans termed these attacks *Kanalkampf* (Channel war), their purpose being to cut Britain's supply lines while destroying as many British aircraft as possible.

Many of the German pilots had served in Condor Legion, during the Spanish Civil War. Their experience had led them to develop a loose flight formation that was better suited to dog fights than the traditional V-formation the British used. With its superior tactics, combat-hardened pilots and new aircraft, the German Luftwaffe ought to have been superior.

Churchill: "We will never surrender"

Although Hitler and his staff planned Operation Sea Lion down to the smallest detail, they didn't believe a real military invasion would be necessary. Hitler assumed that Britain would recognise "her militarily hopeless situation" and that a small push would be enough to make the British surrender and sign a peace accord on German terms.

Much had changed since October 1938, however, when Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had signed the Munich Agreement with the German dictator in the hope of there being "peace for our time". Winston Churchill had been appointed to the office on the same day the German tanks had rolled into France and he was not a man to be easily intimidated. After the last British troops had been evacuated from Dunkirk, he declared that "We shall go on to the end... We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; We will never surrender."

Aggressive tactics surprised the Germans

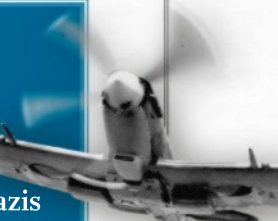
The Luftwaffe was therefore surprised at the dogged resistance it met over the English Channel. The RAF had just over 600 modern fighter planes, half the German number. But in spite of Britain's unquestionable numerical inferiority in both pilots and machines, they shot down ten German aircraft on the first day for the loss of just two planes.

Technically, the British fighter planes were more on a par with their German counterparts, and the RAF was a tougher opponent than the poorly equipped air forces that the German pilots had been up against until that point. In addition, the British had the advantage that German fighters had to use fuel to cross the Channel and fight over enemy territory. Thus, they only had a short time to engage the enemy before they had to return home – if they could.

In the bitter fighting that followed, one of the British squadrons developed a bold tactic. Instead of flying over the German bombers and turning to attack them from behind, they flew directly towards the German aircraft while firing their machine guns. This approach made it easier for the British to target their enemies and forced the German pilots to turn to avoid a collision. This made them even easier to hit. But it was a dangerous tactic and RAF fighters did sometimes collide with German foes.

For almost a month, German attacks continued on British ships and ports. And although British fighters tried to protect the convoys, many cargo ships with vital supplies were sunk. Losses in the air were high on both sides, but the RAF accounted for most 'kills'; between 10th and 23rd July, the British lost 45 aircraft to the Luftwaffe's 82.

It didn't take the Germans long to realise that they needed to change their strategy to counter the skill and determination of the RAF pilots. Consequently they began to focus on destroying British airbases, aircraft and radar equipment. Head of the Luftwaffe, Hermann Göring,



Foreign pilots helped the British

Pilots from countries occupied by the Nazis eagerly joined the RAF and fought like heroes against the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain.

Of the nearly 3,000 pilots who fought for the British in WWII, 574 were foreigners. Some had fled from countries that had just been occupied by the Germans. These men were highly motivated and often possessed great experience. The language proved a major barrier, however, and foreigners rarely came equipped with experience of modern planes such as the Spitfire.

Despite these difficulties, foreign pilots served with distinction: in particular, the two purely Polish squadrons (302 and 303) were known for their combat ability. The Poles were the largest single group of foreigners with about 145 men, but New Zealand (127), Canada (112), Czechoslovakia (89) and the United States (7) also joined the Royal Air Force.

A lack of pilots forced the RAF to cut the training time for new pilots.

Fighter plane was better equipped

The German Messerschmitt-fighter was both faster and better armed than the British Spitfire, but the Spitfire couldn't be beaten on manoeuvrability.

Both the British Spitfire and German Messerschmitt Bf 109 belonged to a new generation of combat aircraft. Germany developed the Bf 109 immediately after Hitler came to power in 1933, while the first Spitfire went into the air the following year in reaction to Germany's rearming. The two machines were well matched although the Bf 109 was faster. The German plane also had the advantage in terms of weapons. In addition to two machine guns mounted on the hull, the Messerschmitts carried two 20-mm machine guns on its wings. The Spitfire only had 8-mm machine guns (four machine guns on each wing).

Messerschmitt could fly higher

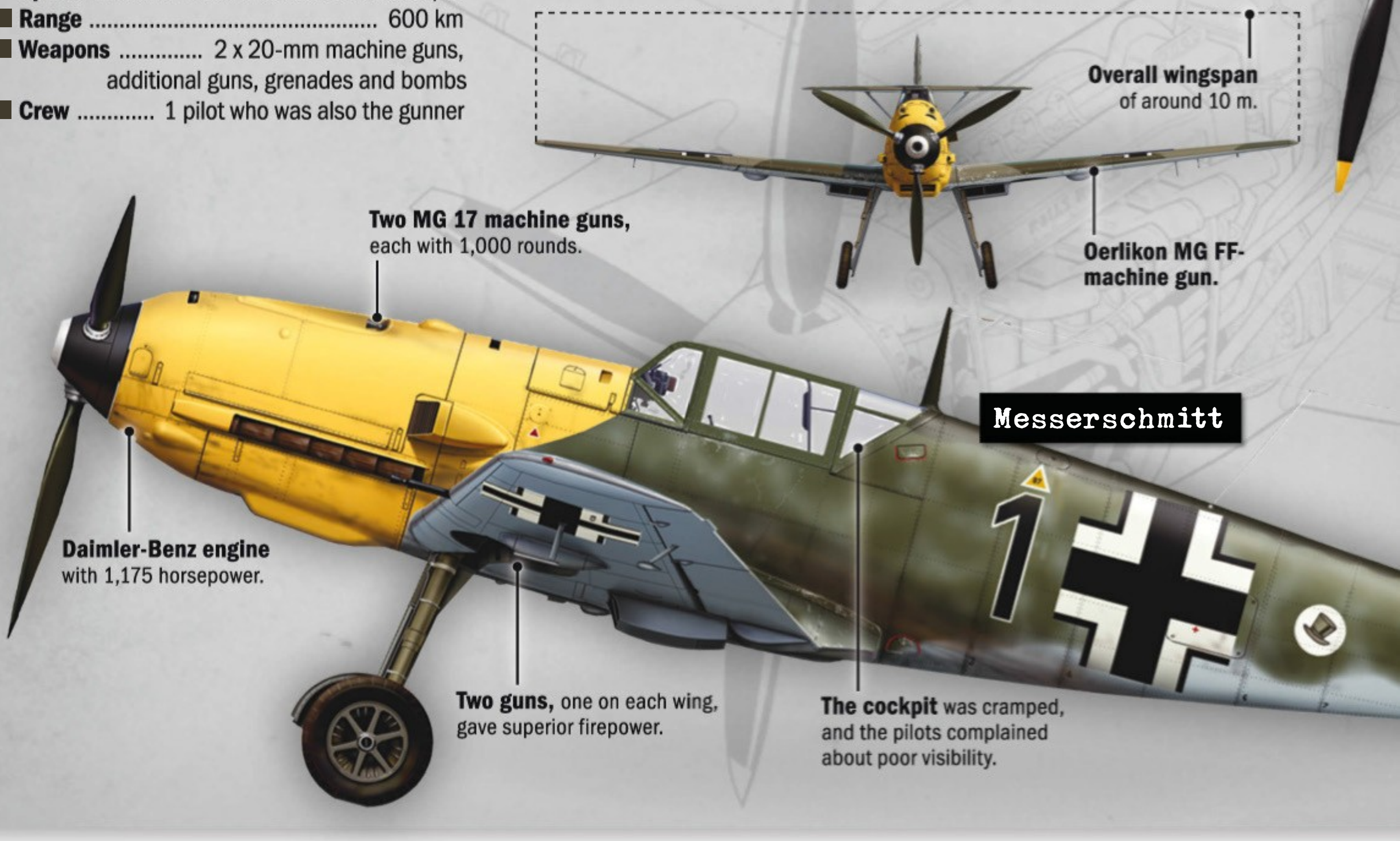
Range was a challenge during the Battle of Britain. With a full tank, a Messerschmitt Bf 109 could fly 600 kilometres, which only gave it 10 minutes flight time over London before having to return. On the other hand, the Bf 109 could fly higher than British planes.

- **Take-off weight**................ maximum 3,400 kg
- **Speed** .... maximum 640 km/hr
- **Range** .... 600 km
- **Weapons** .... 2 x 20-mm machine guns, additional guns, grenades and bombs
- **Crew** .... 1 pilot who was also the gunner

FACT

BEST ENGINE

■ The Daimler-Benz direct fuel injection engine provided the Bf 109 with an even supply of fuel during violent manoeuvres that the Spitfire's engine couldn't match.


Overall wingspan of around 10 m.
Oerlikon MG FF-machine gun.
Two MG 17 machine guns, each with 1,000 rounds.
Messerschmitt
Daimler-Benz engine with 1,175 horsepower.
Two guns, one on each wing, gave superior firepower.
The cockpit was cramped, and the pilots complained about poor visibility.
1

threw himself into the task with zeal: "The Führer has ordered me to crush Britain with my Luftwaffe", he declared proudly.

GERMANS ATTACKED RADAR STATIONS

Operation *Adlerangriff* (Eagle Attack) became the code name of a series of German raids designed to break the RAF. The first one came on 12th August, when a group of German bombers attacked radar stations on the south coast of England. Britain's radar system was one of the RAF's greatest assets. The attack knocked out several radar stations, and a few hours later, the Nazis sent around 220 bombers and fighters from southern Germany to bomb RAF airbases.

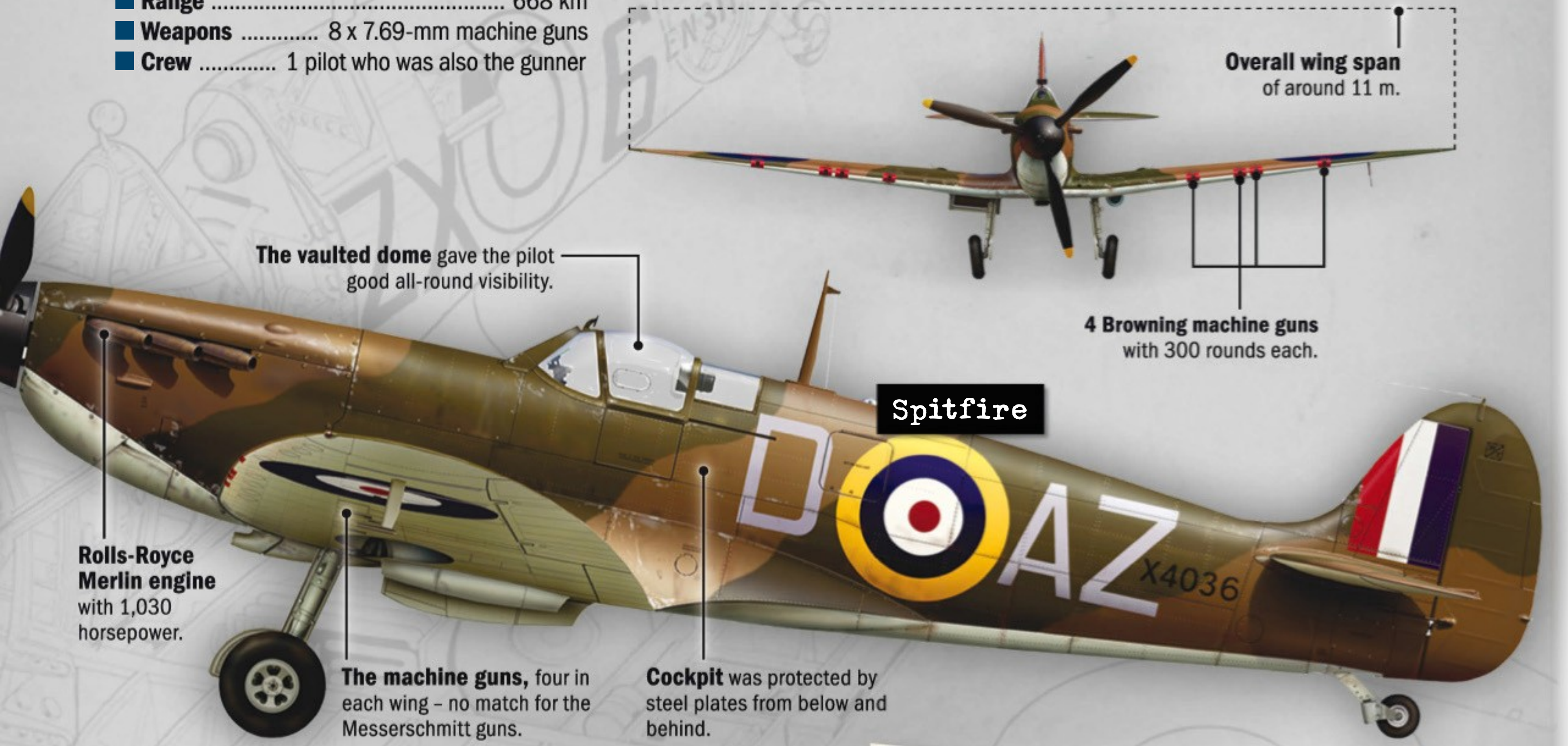
After a few hours the radar system was operational once again. The following day a fresh wave of bombers swept over the bases and more devastation followed. Both hangars and the planes inside were destroyed, workshops were flattened

Spitfire was an aerial acrobat

Rapid twists and turns in the air were the Spitfire's strength. The aircraft's wings were elliptical, resulting in great aerodynamics and manoeuvrability. If forced, the Spitfire could shake off its pursuant by rolling half a turn and then pulling out quickly from the subsequent dive.

- **Take-off weight** .... maximum 2,651 kg
- **Speed** .... 560 km/hr
- **Range** .... 668 km
- **Weapons** .... 8 x 7.69-mm machine guns
- **Crew** .... 1 pilot who was also the gunner

Goggles protected fighter pilots' eyes – for example, if the window in the cockpit was broken.


Overall wing span of around 11 m.
4 Browning machine guns with 300 rounds each.
The vaulted dome gave the pilot good all-round visibility.
Spitfire
D AZ
X4036
Rolls-Royce Merlin engine with 1,030 horsepower.
The machine guns, four in each wing – no match for the Messerschmitt guns.
Cockpit was protected by steel plates from below and behind.

German fighter aircraft had the task of protecting bombers during their missions to Britain. The bombers didn't have enough firepower to defend themselves.

and the telephone system was put out of action. Runways were bombed, grounding the pilots. Göring was convinced that the British only had about 450 fighters left and that the Battle of Britain would be over in a couple of weeks.

Aviation industry was given priority

In fact, British aviation manufacturers had made sure that the RAF still had over 700 operational fighters. Having foreseen such a targeted air campaign, Churchill had established the Ministry for Aircraft Production three months earlier, in May.

The ministry ensured that the British economy was on a war footing and manufacturers of aircraft and related products were given priority access to most raw materials.

Private industries, not least the automotive sector, also contributed by providing equipment and assisting with the operation of state-run aircraft factories. »

Aircraft production grew at record pace in Britain just as the German air industry, which wasn't prioritised in the same way began to see a drop in manufacturing figures. From June to September 1940, Germany built 775 new Messerschmitt aircraft, whereas Britain delivered 1,900 new fighters – almost three times the number. It was Britain's ramped-up production that would eventually see off Göring's Luftwaffe.

In mid-August, the Germans began to concentrate attacks on the main RAF airbases, including Tangmere on the south coast and Kenley and Biggin Hill just south-east of London. During the last two weeks of August, Biggin Hill was bombed almost daily.

Luftwaffe killed RAF's best pilots

For several weeks, British pilots at Biggin Hill were sent up time and again to defend against the German fighters. After days without sleep, they were exhausted, and fatigue began to sap at their concentration and fighting ability.

The same was true at many of the other bases. On 15th August, the Luftwaffe bombed 2,200 British bases. In order to spare personnel at the hardest-hit airfields, the RAF began to rotate pilots between bases.

Along with his colleagues from 616 Squadron, Spitfire pilot Hugh Dundas was sent to Kenley to relieve the pilots there. "It never occurred to us that we should not continue together indefinitely. And so we drank a little more than usual at lunchtime and went down to the airfield... eager to take off for Kenley and glory." They were met with a shocking sight: much of the base lay in ruins. The wreckage of planes and vehicles was all around the edge of the field and the landing area was pitted with bomb craters.

When Churchill concluded at the end of August that "never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few", he was recalling similar scenes.

The RAF was on the brink of collapse. On 24th August, the south-east coast base of Manston was virtually levelled by 20 Ju-88 bombers. After that, the base was closed and only served as an emergency landing ground. At the start of September, six out of seven bases belonging to Group 11 – the Jagger Group, which was defending London – were almost wiped out. British planes were also being shot down at an alarming rate. Within two weeks – from 26th August to 6th September – the RAF lost 273 aircraft, and despite factories operating at maximum capacity, production could not keep up.

More disastrous still was the loss of pilots. After just ten days at Kenley, Dundas had lost most of his original 12 colleagues from 616 Squadron: five were killed or were declared missing in action and another five were injured. At the start of the Battle of Britain, the RAF was only training 65 pilots a week, but it was losing around 120 pilots every week. It was a situation that couldn't be sustained for long. In the end, the shortage of pilots became so desperate that training for new recruits was cut to just four weeks. Unfortunately, the new, fast-tracked pilots were far less effective than the men they replaced. Records detailing the pilots' victories showed that 80 percent of enemy aircraft were shot down by just ten percent of the pilots – the most experienced ones.

The Hurricane was an RAF workhorse. The fighter was not as fast as the Spitfire, but it was easier to produce being composed of a canvas skin over a metal airframe.

Many of the new pilots were simply sent into the air with only the most basic knowledge of flying. They had not learned how to operate the aircraft's machine guns and only a few had learned to fly in formation. This meant the new planes tended to drop out of formation, becoming easy prey for German fighters.

The RAF's senior commanders knew that Britain would lose the battle if the Germans continued their current strategy. The Germans, were also losing planes and pilots, but they had more to start with and they were slowly gaining the upper hand, and the Luftwaffe could be forgiven for thinking the RAF was finished as a fighting force.

Hitler, however, was becoming impatient.

In retaliation for German bombers accidentally hitting London, the British bombed Berlin. The reprisals infuriated Hitler, because the Nazis had promised the German people that Berlin would never be attacked. He also believed that a change in strategy might force the stubborn British to surrender, which would allow him to focus on the Soviet Union. Rotterdam and Warsaw had shown what carpet bombing could do to a city – now it was London's turn.

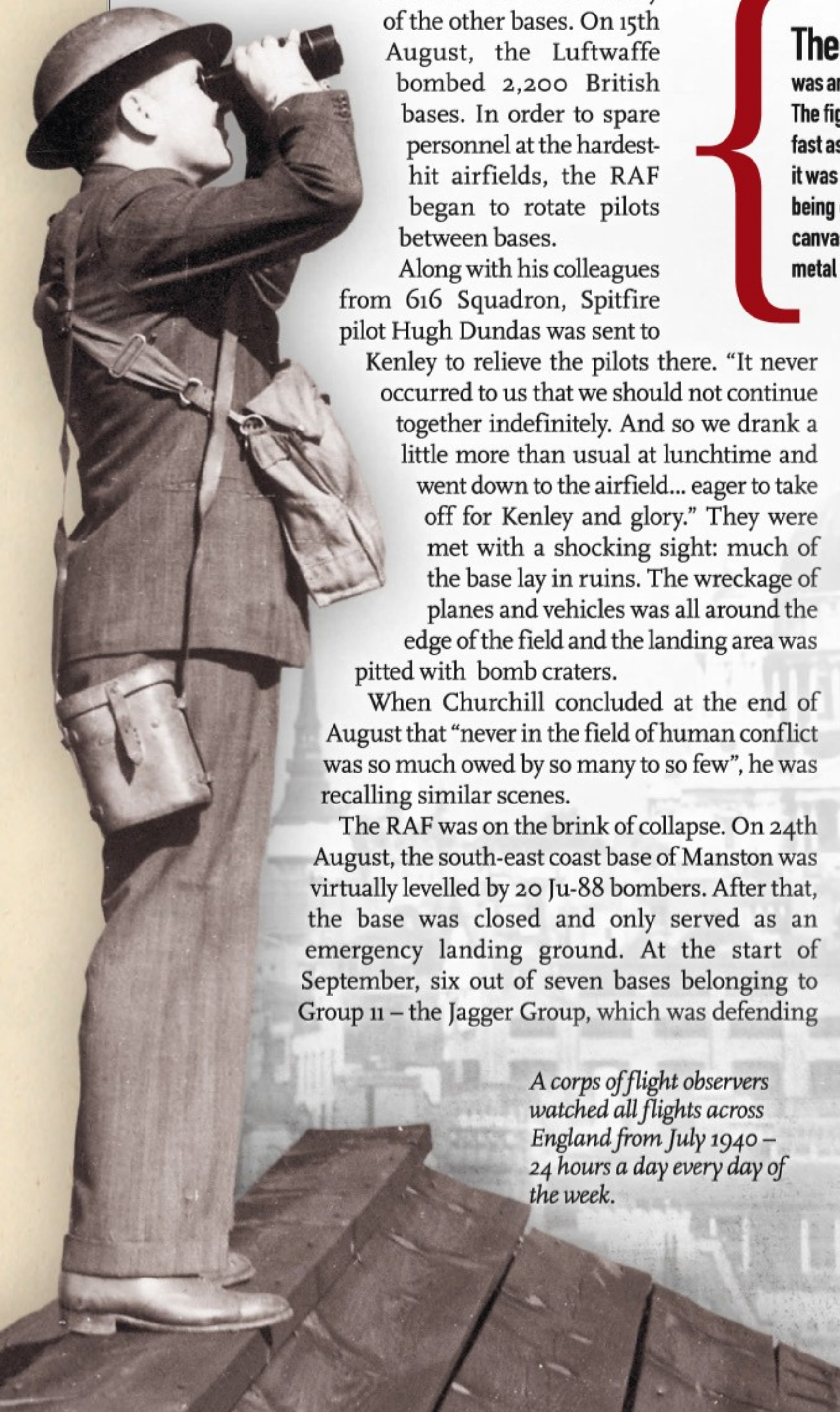
Nearly a thousand German aircraft participated in the first attack, which came late in the afternoon on 7th September. The bombs hit the docks where a gasworks exploded in a huge fireball. The docklands were in flames. An ammunition depot and a residential area were also hit. 306 were killed.

"Explosions were everywhere, there just was not a break, bang after bang after bang," George Turnbull, a London home guard recalled. "The clang of bells from fire service vehicles and ambulances were drowned out by these bombs... God, this seemed to go on for hours."

The Luftwaffe bombed London daily for almost two months. The Blitz – as the attacks became known – hit hardest in the poor residential areas of London's East End.

Britons were strong and united

East Enders were forced into crowded and dirty shelters, without toilets or sanitation. The government deliberately refused to build large, comfortable shelters as it dreaded the idea that people would want to stay in them permanently. If

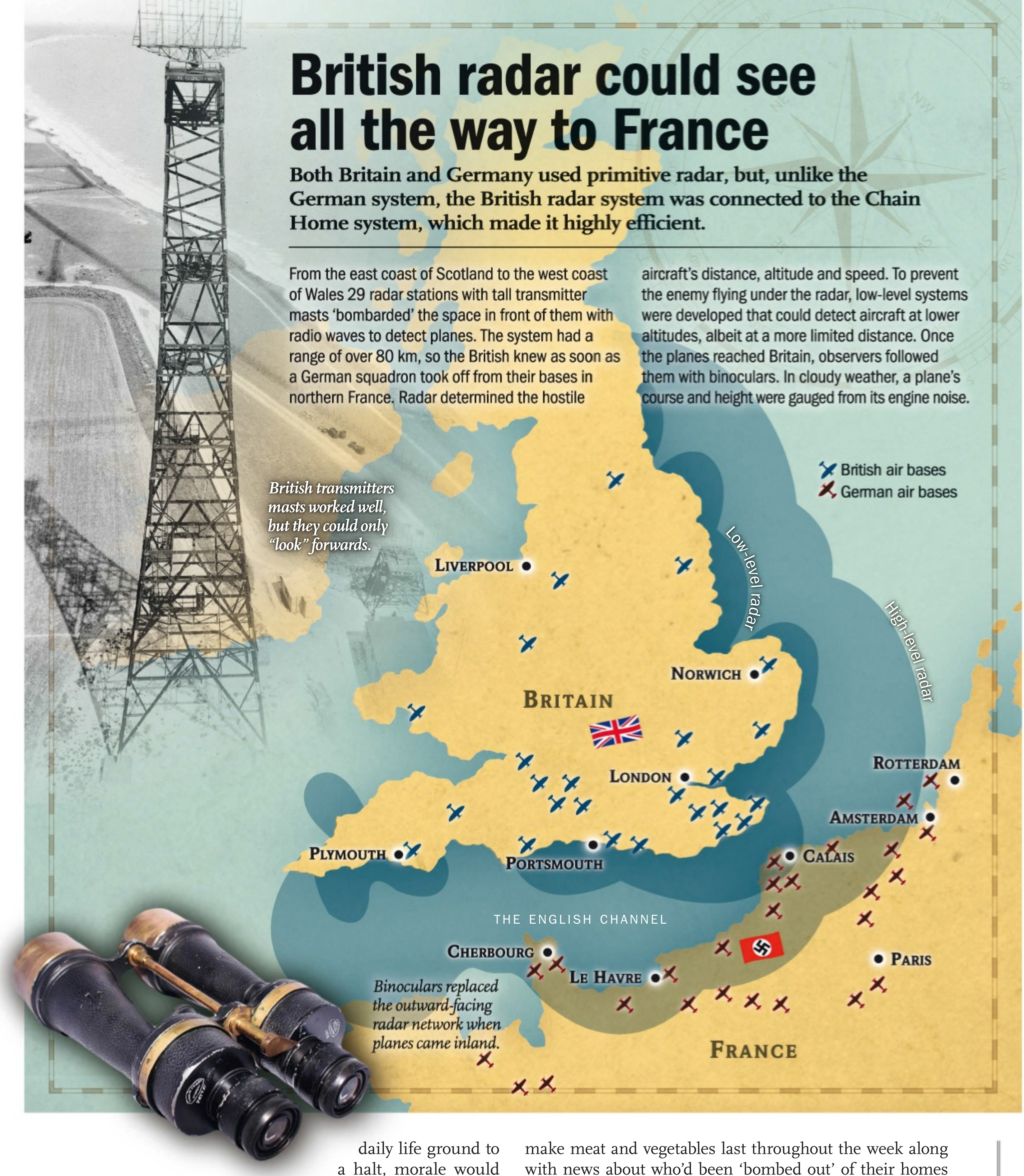


A corps of flight observers watched all flights across England from July 1940 – 24 hours a day every day of the week.

British radar could see all the way to France

Both Britain and Germany used primitive radar, but, unlike the German system, the British radar system was connected to the Chain Home system, which made it highly efficient.

From the east coast of Scotland to the west coast of Wales 29 radar stations with tall transmitter masts 'bombarded' the space in front of them with radio waves to detect planes. The system had a range of over 80 km, so the British knew as soon as a German squadron took off from their bases in northern France. Radar determined the hostile aircraft's distance, altitude and speed. To prevent the enemy flying under the radar, low-level systems were developed that could detect aircraft at lower altitudes, albeit at a more limited distance. Once the planes reached Britain, observers followed them with binoculars. In cloudy weather, a plane's course and height were gauged from its engine noise.



British transmitters masts worked well, but they could only "look" forwards.

Binoculars replaced the outward-facing radar network when planes came inland.

daily life ground to a halt, morale would fall, or so the argument went. For the same reason, the government asked the press to write about parties and party gatherings in London and Churchill raged when he heard that well-off families had sent their children out of the city.

The hard-pressed residents of the East End continued their daily routine as well as they could – largely because they had no other choice. Over time, their disrupted days found new rhythms. Housewives swapped tips on how to make meat and vegetables last throughout the week along with news about who'd been 'bombed out' of their homes while queuing for their rations.

Folk came together in basements and on underground platforms during raids waiting for the 'All Clear' signal telling them that the streets were safe again – for now.

Even though casualties were high and the inhabitants were exhausted due to lack of sleep and rationing, the heavy bombing of the English capital didn't break British resolve as Hitler had hoped. After the first night's attacks, American newspaper journalist Edward Murrow wrote:

"This night bombing is serious and sensational. It makes headlines, kills people and smashes property, but it doesn't win wars ... [and] will not cause this country to collapse."

Ankle straps held a pilot's boots on his feet if he had to parachute from the plane.

A MUCH-NEEDED BREAK

Murrow had read the situation correctly. The shift from bombarding airbases to civilian areas gave the RAF much-needed breathing room. The airbases were repaired, pilot numbers grew, and the industry was once again able to meet the force's demand for new aircraft. On 15th September, when the Luftwaffe arrived over London for what would prove to be the decisive battle of the air campaign against Britain, the skies were filled with Spitfire and Hurricane fighters.

The day was an unmitigated disaster for the Luftwaffe. A furious Göring blamed the fighter pilots, claiming they had let down the rest of the German air force.

Two days later, Hitler's Operation Sea Lion was postponed indefinitely. The nightly bombings of London continued over the coming months, but Germany really lost the Battle of Britain on 15th September. After October, the number of raids dropped, but they didn't stop completely until May 1941. By then the Blitz had taken more than 20,000 lives in London alone. Large parts of the city were devastated, and other cities across Britain were also affected. In total, civilian casualties across the country numbered close to 43,000 killed and 46,000 injured.

British morale and self-belief was boosted by the confrontation with the Luftwaffe. Britain was the first country to have resisted the modern German war machine – and shown that Hitler was not invincible, after all. Of course, Britain continued to be blockaded by German U-boats, warships and bombers who cut the country's supply lines, but she was an island fortress that had once again resisted invasion. With Churchill at the helm and sensible rationing of food and fuel, the British knew they could last for a long time.

Three years later, bombers came in their thousands again over southern Germany, only this time their pilots were British and their targets were German cities...

London's volunteers worked night after night

A combination of voluntary fire workers, barrage balloons and British anti-aircraft guns kept up the morale of London's beleaguered citizens.

"Send all the bloody pumps you've got – the whole world's on fire", the message sounded when the first German bombs hit London's docks in the afternoon of 7th September. At the beginning of the Blitz in the autumn of 1940, the city's volunteer fire service numbered 25,000, many of them women.

In order to protect particularly vulnerable targets, the British set up barrage balloons. The large, silver-coloured balloons were tethered above the potential target by steel cables, which prevented bombers from flying at low altitude.

Despite violent daily bombings, Londoners continued their daily lives as best they could.

Anti-aircraft guns were also set up alongside powerful search lights which picked out targets for the shooters. They weren't particularly effective, but the air-defence guns contributed to a sense of safety that helped reinforce morale.

The London Fire Service worked 24 hours a day to put out the many fires in the city.

Losses clipped Luftwaffe's wings

The 114-day battle over Britain cost the German Luftwaffe around half of its planes. Losses of the large Heinkel bomber were particularly high and proved difficult to replace.

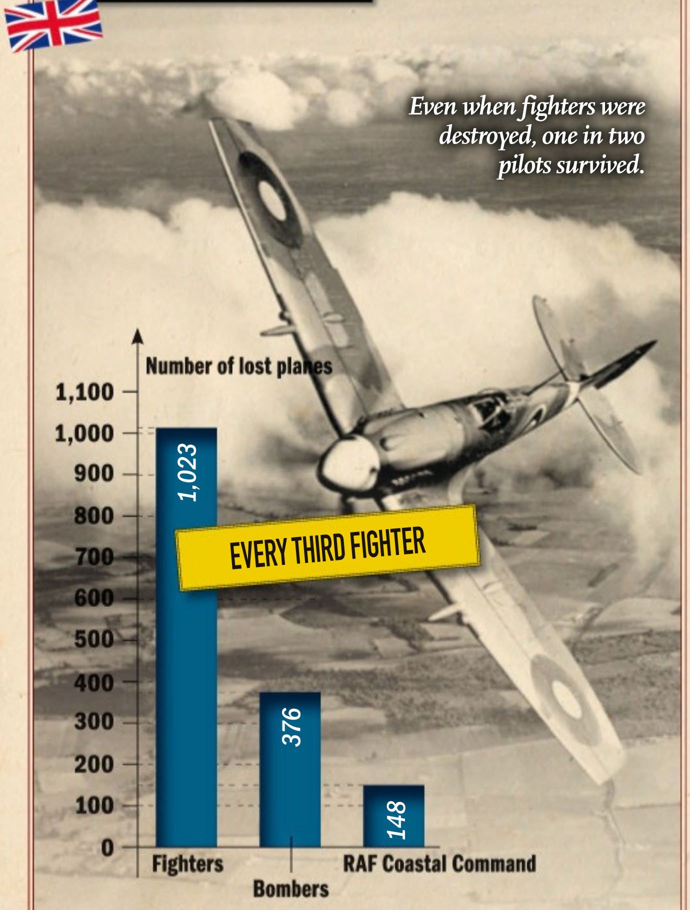
Luftwaffe's Heinkel He-111 was the Germans' strategic bomber at the start of the war.

The Battle of Britain was one of the most significant moments in recent military history. The RAF not only prevented an invasion of Britain, but convinced the United States that the country would be a reliable ally.

The RAF delivered an emphatic defeat to the Luftwaffe. The loss of so many German bombers put a damper on the German war effort for a long time to come. After its reprieve during the Blitz, the British were able to build new planes to replace lost ones, but the hard-pressed German air industry found it difficult to keep up.

During the Battle of Britain, the British built 2,354 new aircraft, while the Germans only managed 975. There was also a huge loss of lives, meaning Germany lacked pilots to fly the missions.

British losses



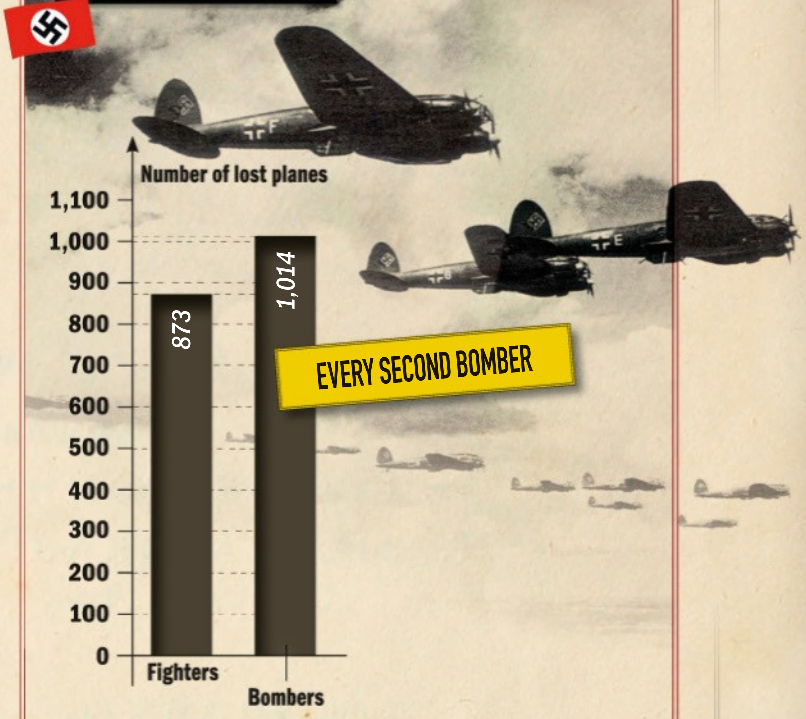
Even when fighters were destroyed, one in two pilots survived.

Total planes: 1,547 out of 1,963

Personnel: 537

Civilian loss: 43,000 killed
46,000 wounded

German losses



Total planes: 1,887 out of 2,550

Personnel: 2,662

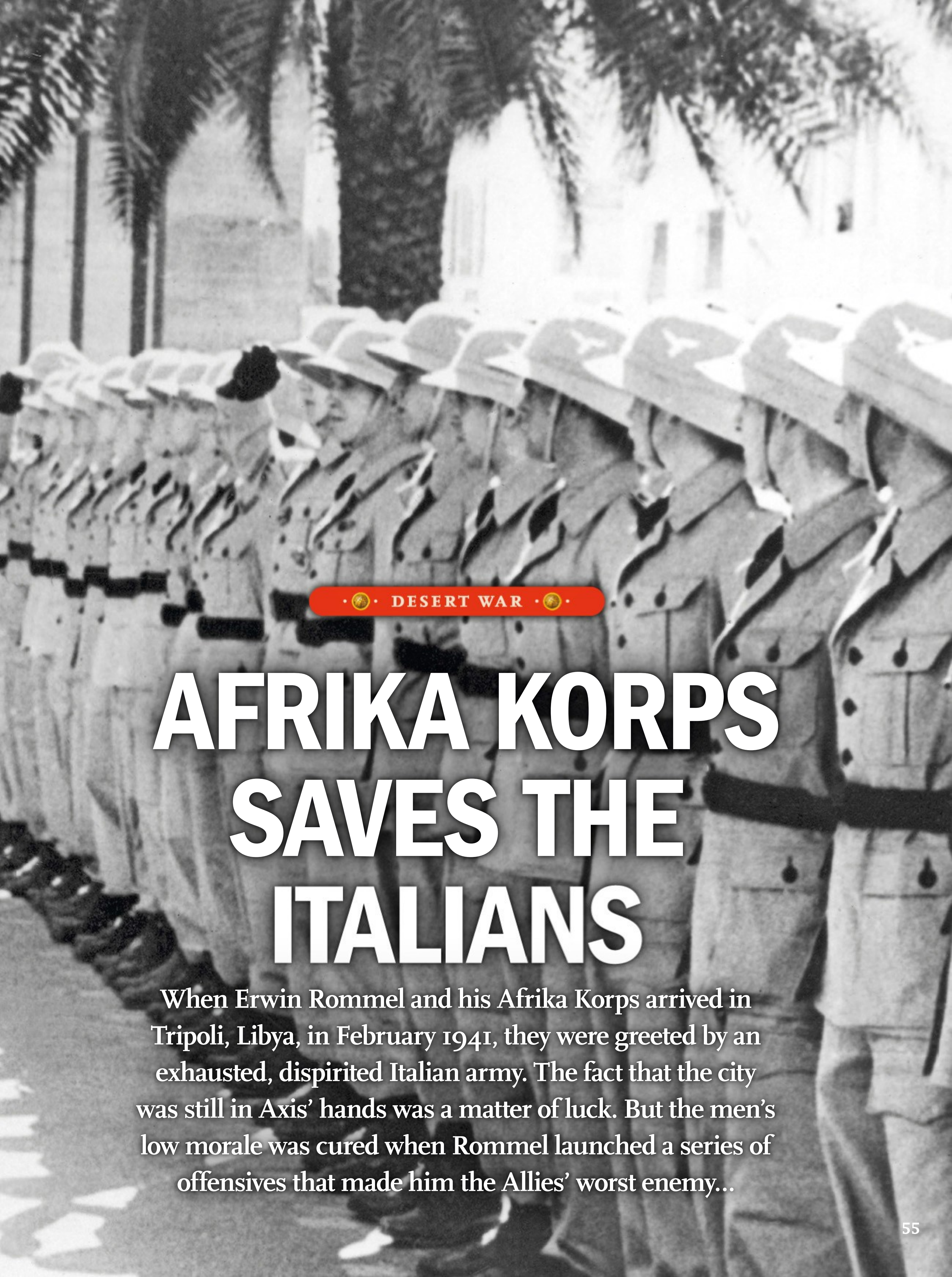
Civilian loss: In principle none, because the battle took place over Britain, but British reprisal bombings cost a smaller number of German lives.

German bombers had four men on board. They rarely survived a crash.

General Erwin Rommel (right), Afrika Korps' commander, reviews his men alongside General Italo Gariboldi, Libya's Italian governor in 1941.

1941

12TH FEBRUARY



DESERT WAR

AFRIKA KORPS SAVES THE ITALIANS

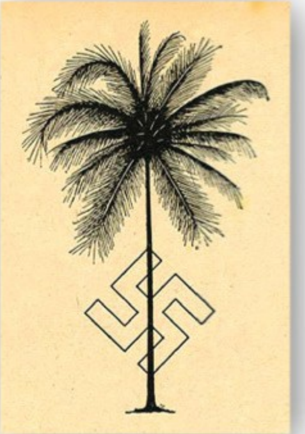
When Erwin Rommel and his Afrika Korps arrived in Tripoli, Libya, in February 1941, they were greeted by an exhausted, dispirited Italian army. The fact that the city was still in Axis' hands was a matter of luck. But the men's low morale was cured when Rommel launched a series of offensives that made him the Allies' worst enemy...

North Africa 1941

THE STAGE IS SET

Libya
Egypt

In Europe, the Axis powers thunder forward, with one country after another falling to Hitler's blitzkrieg. In North Africa, however, the reverse is true. Here, Hitler's allies, the Italians, are being driven back everywhere. If they are to retain any kind of foothold in Africa, the Italians need German help, and they need it urgently.



The Afrika Korps' logo was a palm tree with a swastika across the trunk.

The port of Tripoli was bathed in artificial light as sand-coloured tanks, each decorated with a palm tree overlaid with a swastika, rolled out of the German ships' holds. The unloading lasted all night, but by 11.00 the following morning, the task was complete. The soldiers, who were the core of Nazi Germany's new Afrika Korps, lined up to hear the corps' newly appointed leader, Erwin Rommel, speak.

"We are about to embark on a great safari," he declared confidently.

"Heia safari!" a young soldier, inspired by Rommel, replied spontaneously. Soon, his comrades began chanting the phrase, giving birth to the Afrika Korps' bold battle cry.

The men in the corps – which Hitler had recently created – needed all the fighting spirit they could muster. While the Wehrmacht advanced almost unchallenged in Europe, the Axis powers were in retreat in North Africa. Hitler's ally, the Italian dictator, Benito Mussolini, was in command of the war in North Africa, but the Italian forces' strength and morale left a lot to be desired. Italy's army was the worst in Europe.

Most of their arms were from World War I. Their tanks were almost useless – the soldiers referred to them as "self-propelled coffins" – and vehicles generally were in short supply. The soldiers had to advance on foot – a considerable handicap in the desert.

The result was that the Italians were repeatedly overtaken and checked by the British, who were well supplied with vehicles. By early February 1941, the Italians had lost key Libyan cities, including Sallum, Benghazi and Tobruk. The fact that Tripoli

Australian troops spread out during marches through the desert. This minimised their losses if they came under attack by the Luftwaffe.

"Sweat poured off our bodies

Rommel on the first ghibli sandstorm

was still in the hands of the Axis' forces was only because the British had been forced to withdraw troops early in the year to counter a German offensive in the Balkans. The Axis' glorious victory march was stuck fast in the desert sand.

ITALIANS WERE ON THE BRINK OF COLLAPSE

Hitler was forced to send German forces to North Africa. An offensive blitzkrieg with tanks and air support like that used in Europe was needed to turn the war in Germany's favour. To that end, the Führer created a new unit, the Deutsches Afrikakorps, whose core consisted of two armoured regiments, supported by infantry brigades and air squadrons.

The leader of the corps was 49-year-old Erwin Rommel, who, in addition to being a loyal supporter of Hitler and a skilled military theorist, had also distinguished himself as a brave and enterprising leader of the 7th Panzer Division during the invasion of France. Rommel, who would become known as the Desert Fox, wasn't one to shy away from an attack and was not easily intimidated by an enemy's superior numbers. He would need both attributes in North Africa. When he arrived on 12th February, Rommel was shocked by what he found. Defeated Italian troops stumbled back to Tripoli on foot. Despair was plain on every face.

"Morale was as low as it could be," Rommel wrote later. If the Allies had chosen to attack Tripoli, there would have been nothing to stop their advance. "There is only one way to stop the rot!" he told Hitler's aide, General Rudolf Schmundt: "To go on the offensive."

Rommel immediately set about preparing his forces. The goal was to reach Egypt, take the strategically important Suez Canal and then continue on into the Persian Gulf region to lay claim to its rich oil wells. But from the »

1889-1959

NAME **LESLIE MORSHEAD**

TITLE **AUSTRALIAN LIEUTENANT GENERAL**

Held Tobruk during the siege

Morshead commanded the garrison in Tobruk, holding the city against Rommel's siege until October 1941. Morshead became a major during World War I. After the war, he worked in a shipping company, but returned to uniform when World War II broke out. Morshead demanded strict discipline and was nicknamed Ming the Merciless by his men after the villainous emperor in the comic book series *Flash Gordon*.

- **Educated as a school teacher.**
- **Served in Borneo and New Guinea.**

1893-1969

NAME **RONALD SCOBIE**

TITLE **BRIGADIER**

Oversaw the breakout from Tobruk

British general Ronald Scobie succeeded Morshead as the commander at Tobruk and participated in the offensive against Rommel in November 1941. Scobie was born in Mandalay, Burma, then a British colony. He joined the Royal Engineers in 1914 and rose rapidly through the ranks. At the outbreak of World War II, he was a brigadier general and deputy director of the British War Office, the ministry responsible for the army.

- **Former high-level rugby player.**
- **Commander of the 70th Division.**

in the unbearable heat"

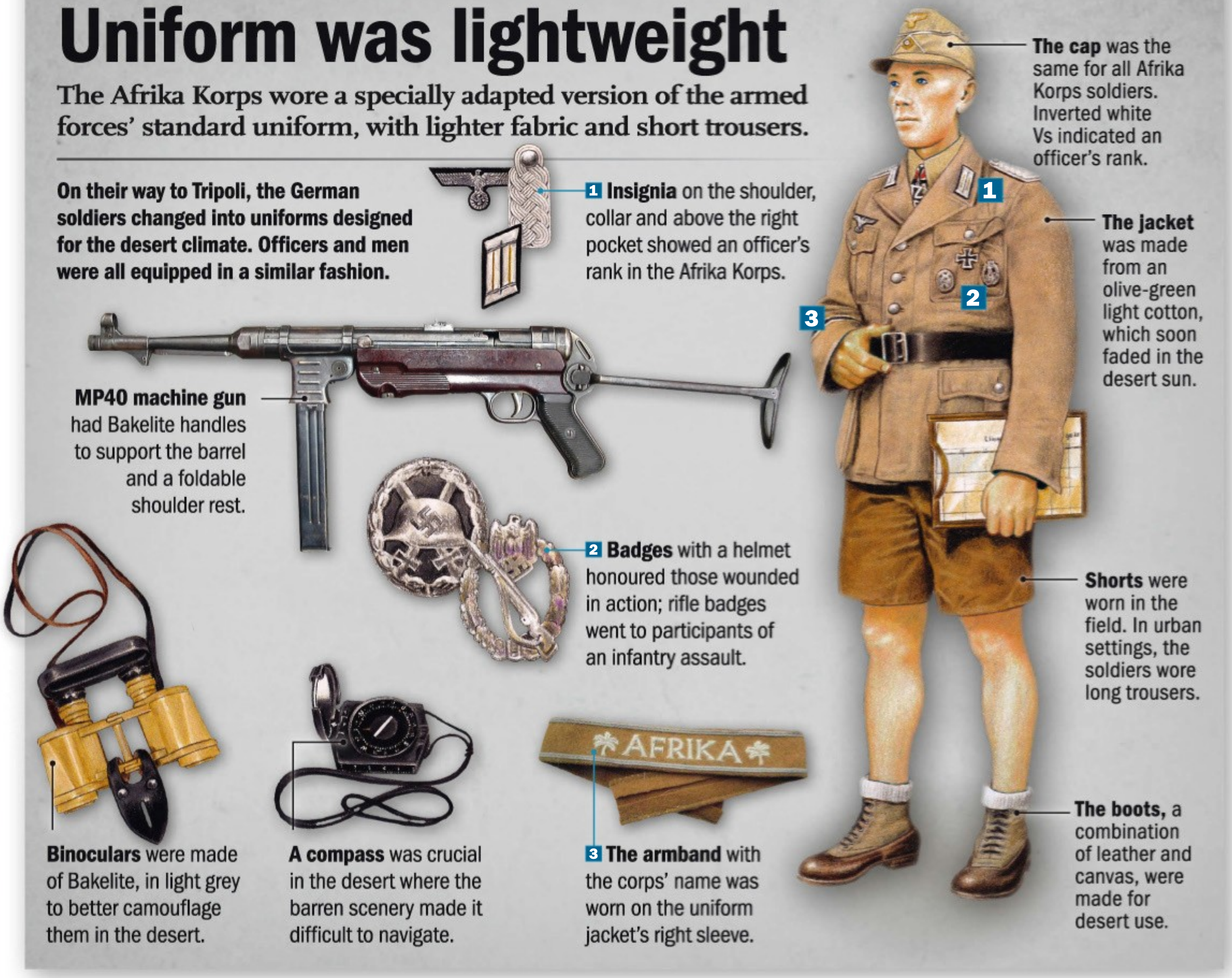
he experienced in North Africa.

UNIFORM

Uniform was lightweight

The Afrika Korps wore a specially adapted version of the armed forces' standard uniform, with lighter fabric and short trousers.

On their way to Tripoli, the German soldiers changed into uniforms designed for the desert climate. Officers and men were all equipped in a similar fashion.



1 Insignia on the shoulder, collar and above the right pocket showed an officer's rank in the Afrika Korps.

MP40 machine gun had Bakelite handles to support the barrel and a foldable shoulder rest.

2 Badges with a helmet honoured those wounded in action; rifle badges went to participants of an infantry assault.

Binoculars were made of Bakelite, in light grey to better camouflage them in the desert.

A compass was crucial in the desert where the barren scenery made it difficult to navigate.

3 The armband with the corps' name was worn on the uniform jacket's right sleeve.

The cap was the same for all Afrika Korps soldiers. Inverted white Vs indicated an officer's rank.

The jacket was made from an olive-green light cotton, which soon faded in the desert sun.

Shorts were worn in the field. In urban settings, the soldiers wore long trousers.

The boots, a combination of leather and canvas, were made for desert use.

outset, the desert offered resistance: "Immense clouds of reddish dust obscured all visibility.... Often the wind was so strong that it was impossible to drive along the Via Balbo [the only modern coastal road]. Sand streamed down the windscreen like water. We gasped for breath painfully through handkerchiefs held over our faces, and sweat poured off our bodies in the unbearable heat," Rommel wrote, describing a giant ghibli sandstorm he experienced on one of his first days in North Africa.

A wide-brimmed canvas helmet with air holes protected soldiers from the sun.

Despite the conditions, the Desert Fox soon began probing the enemy's resistance with limited attacks against small Allied forces. Sensing weakness, he struck in earnest. After driving 800 kilometres through the desert, on 3rd April, the Afrika Korps occupied Benghazi, an important supply port on the way to Egypt.

The Germans and Italians were as amazed as the Allies, whose intelligence services had learned that Hitler had refused to sanction an attack until the Afrika Korps had more men and vehicles. Rommel, however, had acted against Hitler's orders.

"I took the risk against all orders and instructions because the opportunity seemed favourable. No doubt it will all be pronounced good later and they'll all say they'd have done exactly the same in my place," Rommel wrote in a letter to his wife, Lucia, the same day. "You will understand that I can't sleep for happiness," he added. Only Tobruk, a port city further along the coast, now lay between him and Egypt.

Sandstorm delayed the attack on Tobruk

Tobruk itself was unremarkable – just a collection of scattered houses surrounded by dusty palm trees. However, the city was of great strategic value. In addition to possessing the area's best port – the only deep-water port between Tripoli and Alexandria – the city was also well suited as a launch point for forces intent on preventing an enemy from reaching Egypt.

If the Germans could take Tobruk, their supplies would no longer have to travel several hundred kilometres from Tripoli by road, and the way would be open to Egypt. Rommel immediately decided to head towards the city, where the Allies who had fled the attack on Benghazi were now gathering. With a little luck, he would arrive before the Allies could fortify the city. However, the British were just as keen on defending Tobruk as the Germans were on occupying it.

Winston Churchill advised General Sir Archibald Wavell, commander-in-chief of the British forces in the Middle East, that the city must be defended "to the death without thought of retirement". On 9th April, Australian Major General Sir Leslie Morshead arrived with his 9th Division, a force consisting of six infantry brigades, four artillery regiments, two anti-tank regiments, 75 anti-aircraft guns, 42 tanks and a total of 36,000 men.

The formidable Australian army did not scare Rommel, who launched an offensive the same day with three units: the first would attack from the west, the second from the south-east, and the third would head directly for the centre of the fortress. The attack never came to fruition, however, because a violent sandstorm, like the one Rommel had experienced a few months earlier, delayed the unit sent to attack from the south-east. On 11th April, Rommel's forces managed to ring the fort and the Desert Fox was optimistic about his chances. "Once Tobruk has fallen, which I hope will be in ten days or a fortnight, the situation here will be secure," he wrote confidently to his wife on 23rd April. But it wasn't so easy.

Despite Rommel's forces attempting several attacks, the Allies held on. After fierce fighting on 3rd and 4th May, during which 650 Germans and 500 Italians were killed in order to win just a few metres of terrain, the Desert Fox realised that the siege would be both prolonged and painful – although both parties were blissfully unaware at that time that the suffering would endure for 221 days.

SUPPLIES WERE BLOCKED

The siege made it impossible for the Allies to gather supplies from the surrounding countryside. And Rommel used air power to add to their problems. "Water is very short in Tobruk, the British troops are getting only half a litre. With our dive-bombers I'm hoping to cut their ration still further," he wrote.

But Rommel and his forces also suffered. "The heat is getting worse every day and it's a relief when night comes. One's thirst becomes almost unquenchable," he wrote.

Equally serious was the Afrika Korps' lack of military equipment and supplies. Only a few Italian ships arrived. The majority were sunk crossing the Mediterranean. The situation was becoming desperate: Rommel had only received

The small Italian tanks were thinly armoured; the troops referred to them as "self-propelled coffins".

Mussolini's forces were thrown back in Africa

Despite having a ten-to-one advantage, Italian troops fared poorly in Africa, with every offensive campaign pushed back by the Allies.

Benito Mussolini's Italian troops had vastly superior numbers in Africa in 1940. In Egypt, they fielded over 236,000 men, while the British could muster only 36,000 out of a total of 100,000 men under Middle Eastern command. However, the Italian army was spread thinly across North Africa, and it was poorly equipped. Its weapons were outdated and its tanks' thin armour was easily pierced by British guns. All of this conspired to thwart Italian ambitions in the region.

Even in their military campaigns in Italian East Africa – launched from their colonies of Ethiopia, Italian Somaliland and Eritrea – things went wrong, despite there being a large number of Italian and native forces. The invasions in Kenya and Sudan both ended with staggering defeats. Only the invasion of British Somaliland in August 1940 was immediately successful. After a few brief, inconsequential battles, the Allies withdrew from the area. However, two Sikh divisions recaptured Somaliland for the British in 1941.

Unlike the British, the Italians had few vehicles. The soldiers had to march in the heat and desert dust.

29,000 of the 50,000 tonnes of weapons, ammunition and food he required. The Allies, on the other hand, had a steady stream of supplies, shipped in to Tobruk's port by the Royal Navy. In May, 84,000 tonnes of supplies arrived along with 16,000 troops and 238 tanks.

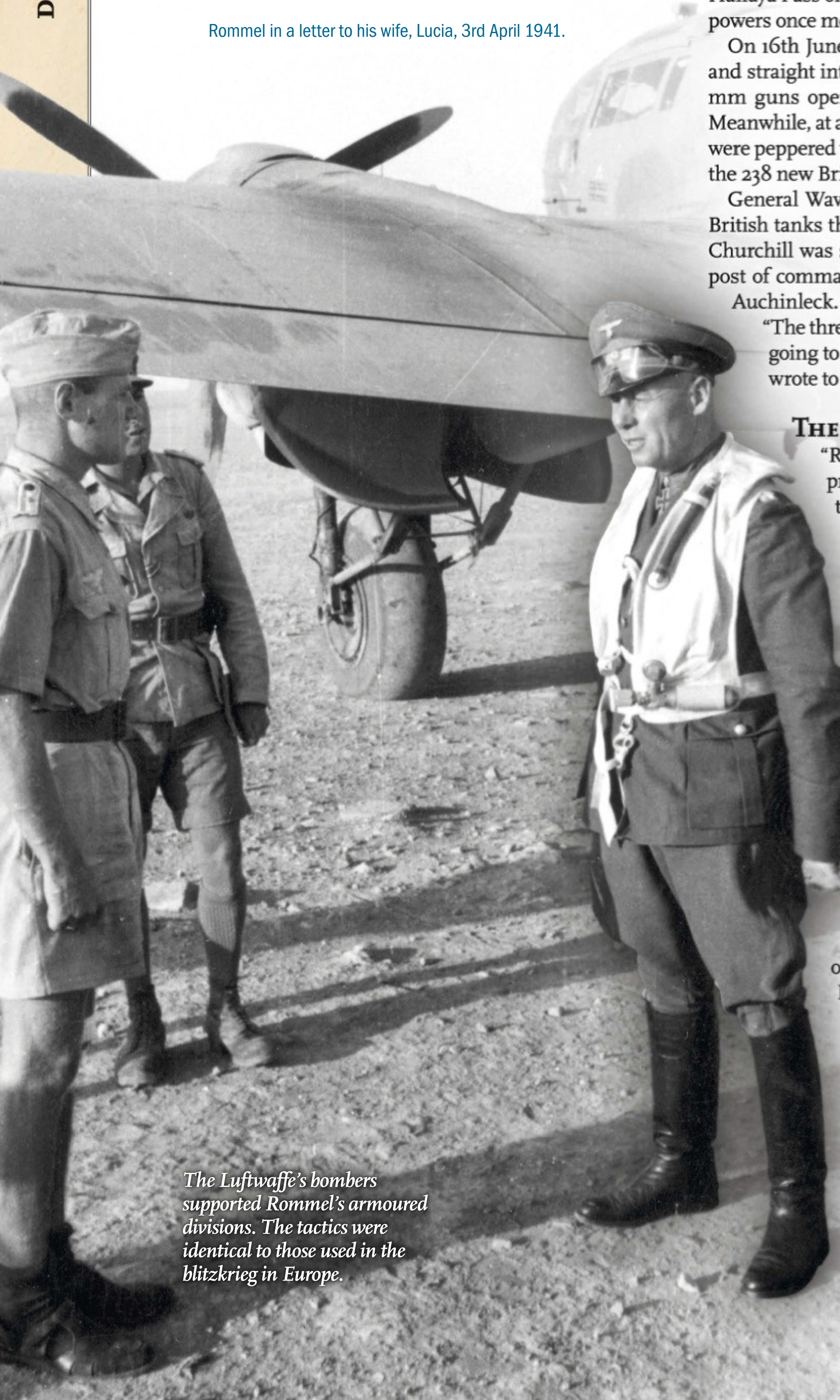
By 15th June, the Allies had amassed enough tanks, aircraft and men to launch a major offensive against the Germans. With Operation Battleaxe, the Allies hoped to lift the siege on Tobruk, recapture the strategically key German-occupied Halfaya Pass on the Egyptian border, and push back the Axis powers once more. But the British were in for a shock.

On 16th June, the Allies' tanks drove to the Halfaya Pass and straight into a trap. A concealed battery of powerful 88-mm guns opened fire on them. Only one tank survived. Meanwhile, at another key site, the Hafid Ridge, Allied tanks were peppered with anti-tank fire. By noon, three-quarters of the 238 new British tanks had been put out of action.

General Wavell ordered a withdrawal, losing most of the British tanks that had not yet been destroyed along the way. Churchill was so enraged that he removed Wavell from the post of commander-in-chief and replaced him with Claude Auchinleck. Rommel, on the other hand, was delighted. "The three-day battle has ended in complete victory. I'm going to go round the troops today to thank them," he wrote to Lucia on 18th June.

"I took the risk against all orders"

Rommel in a letter to his wife, Lucia, 3rd April 1941.



The Luftwaffe's bombers supported Rommel's armoured divisions. The tactics were identical to those used in the blitzkrieg in Europe.

The British would kill Rommel

"Rommel's very name and legend are in the process of becoming a psychological danger to the British Army," an intelligence source noted in the summer of 1941. Shortly after Operation Battleaxe, the British intelligence service decided to assassinate the Desert Fox. During the first attempt, assailants tried to penetrate Rommel's headquarters west of Tobruk, but were captured a few hundred metres from the general's truck.

The second time, British snipers fired on Rommel as he swam in the sea by his new HQ in Badia, but he managed to dive behind a sea wall. "I must be worth quite a lot to the Englishmen," he said in a joke to his adjutant.

So far, however, Rommel had been unable to exploit his psychological edge. The Axis powers were having major problems with supplies, and the situation was only deteriorating. On the 8th November, British warships sank an Italian-escorted convoy with 39,000 tonnes of supplies. The loss was equal to all the supplies Rommel had received in September and October. By mid-November, he had less than 15 percent of the ammunition and fuel he needed.

With his own fighting power declining and that of the Allies rising, Rommel was convinced that the enemy was preparing an offensive and he was determined to strike first. However, Hitler, along with the high command and the dictator's military adviser, Lieutenant-General Alfred Jodl, refused to countenance an attack until the Afrika Korps' scheduled reinforcement in January 1942.

When Rommel received a set of aerial photos from the Luftwaffe showing that the British were building railways through Egypt, he threw them to the floor, declaring "I will not look at them!"

Instead, he took a plane to Rome, from where he called Jodl, who reluctantly agreed to support Rommel's plans after extracting a promise that the offensive would not endanger German forces. The approved attack was scheduled for 23rd November.

Members of the Afrika Korps were given heavy signet rings bearing the corps' logo.

The Afrika Korps passed its test

For once, the British were able to strike first. The intelligence service had obtained a copy of the new plans, drawn up by Rommel himself, and knew precisely which units would be used and where. The Allies attacked on 18th November, the same day as the worst rainstorm in 60 years hit the area around Tobruk. Tents were torn away by the wind, and trucks and guns overturned and sank in sand-bogs. Mudslides and small avalanches of sand triggered mines that should have protected the Germans. Rommel, who had just returned from Italy, wrote to his wife on 20th November: "The enemy offensive began immediately after my arrival. The battle has now reached its crisis. I hope we get through it in good order."

The fighting culminated in a four-day battle at the city of Sidi Rezegh, where Rommel's armoured forces clashed with the British. The British were far superior in strength, but Rommel still managed to secure a tactical victory that cost the British army dearly. The British lost 530 tanks in the battle, while the Axis' losses numbered just 100. But Rommel could not take Tobruk. While the British were still receiving supplies, Rommel's forces were short of everything. Hungry and tired, the German troops were forced to withdraw from Tobruk.

However, the retreat was only temporary. The Afrika Korps had passed its test, and the following year Rommel would return to attack Tobruk again.

PERSPECTIVE

Year ended in retreat

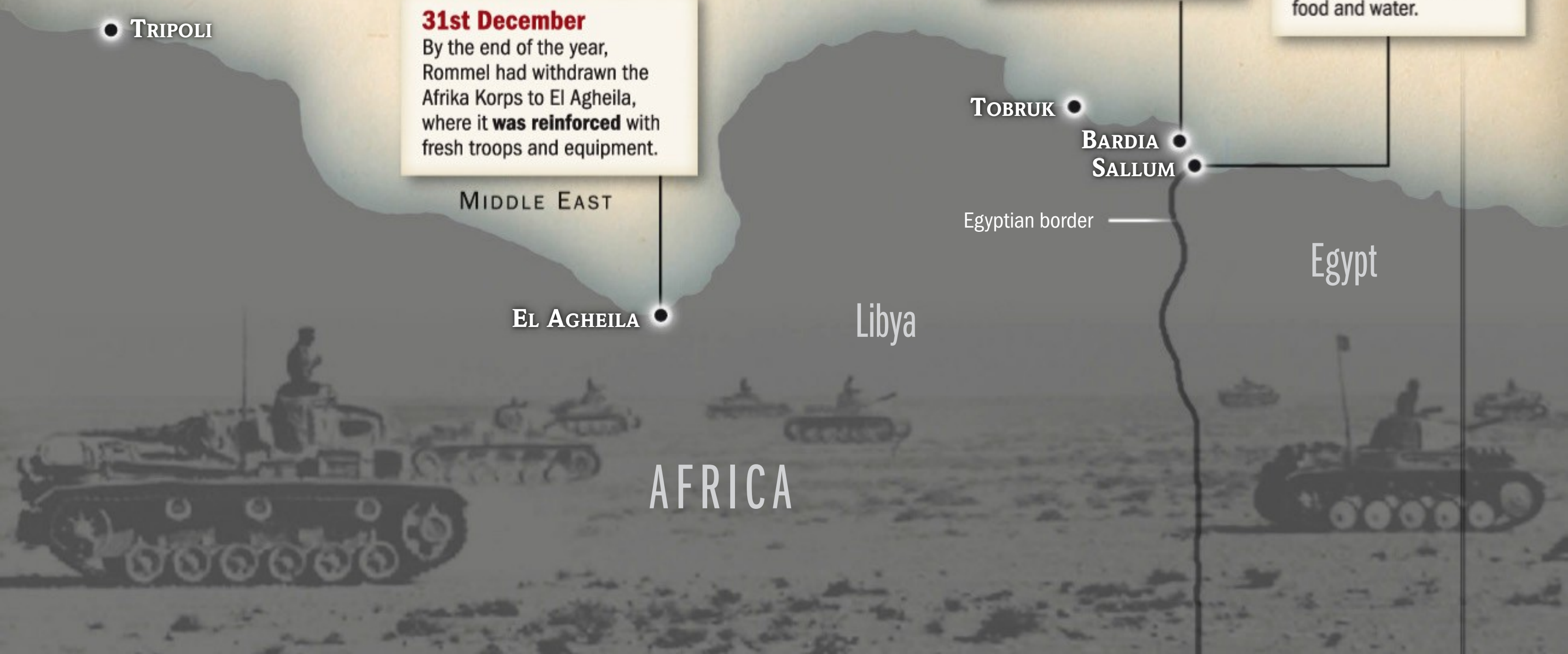
At the end of the year, the Afrika Korps had to abandon the siege of Tobruk and retreat to a position where they could be resupplied before launching a new offensive.

After Rommel's success in 1941, when the Afrika Korps stormed across Libya, besieged Tobruk and briefly threatened the Egyptian border, the British replaced General Wavell with General Auchinleck. At the end of the year, Auchinleck led the Allies in an attack that pushed the Afrika Korps backwards. Some of Rommel's men on the Egyptian border were abandoned in the move, including around 7,000 men at the port city of Bardia and 5,500 Italian troops in Sallum.

2nd January
In Bardia, some **7,000 German soldiers** were left behind. They surrendered on 2nd January 1942.

19th January
Sallum was well fortified and around **5,500 Italian soldiers** held out there until 19th January 1942, when they were forced to surrender due to a lack of food and water.

31st December
By the end of the year, Rommel had withdrawn the Afrika Korps to El Agheila, where it **was reinforced** with fresh troops and equipment.



MIDDLE EAST

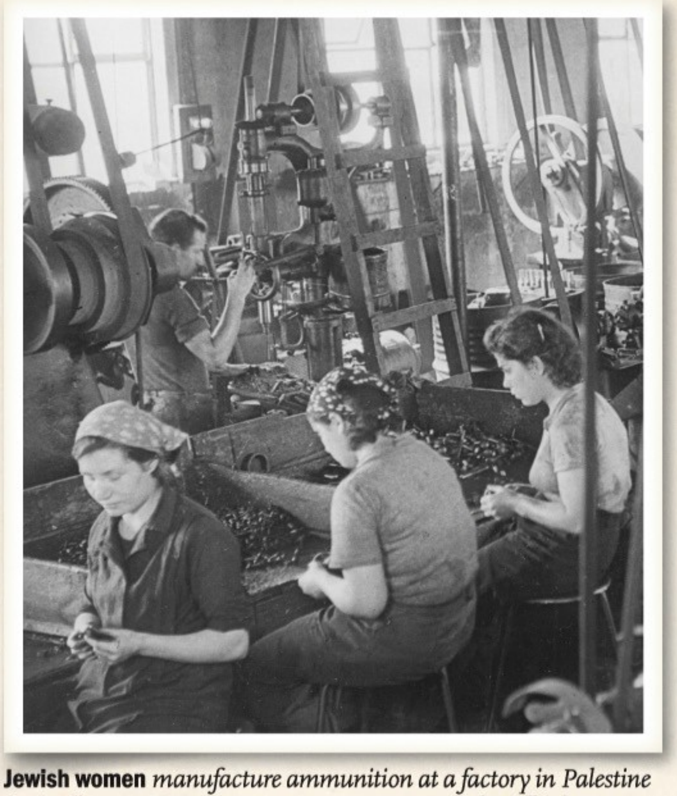
Quiet war broke out

The Middle East was a strategically important area that both sides wanted to control. The Germans and Italians dreamed of using the region as a springboard to establish a potential link with the Japanese in Asia, while the British and Free French tried to defend their colonial possessions.

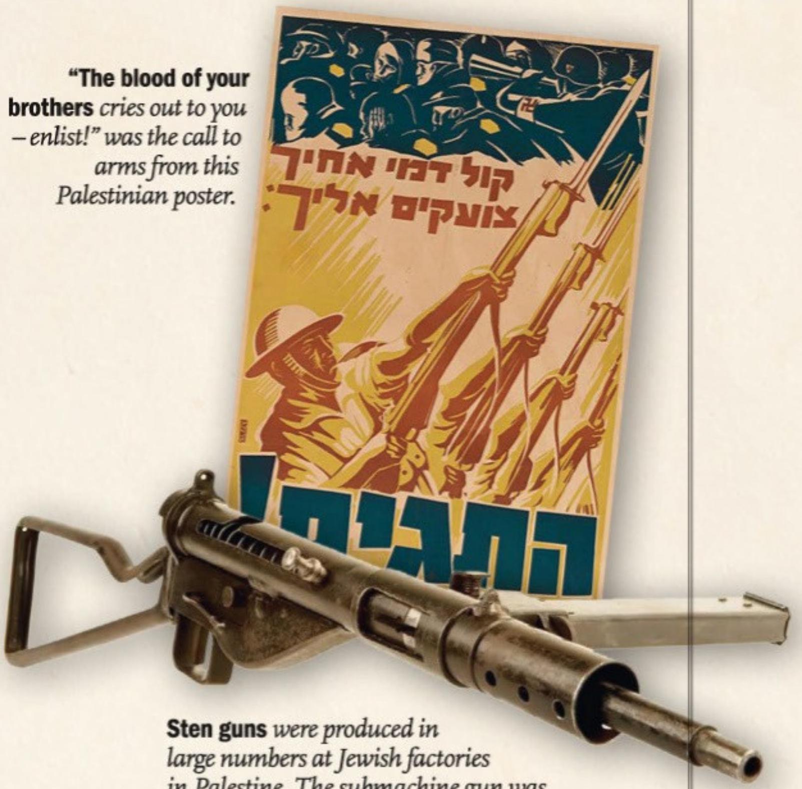
There were few battles, but in 1941, the Allies suspected the Shah of Iran of having pro-German sympathies, which led to a British and Soviet occupation to pre-empt any German invasion. The Shah with his son, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi.

After the invasion, *the Allies used Iran as a transit country for vital supplies being sent to the Soviet Union. Here, train rails are ready to be loaded onto wagons to be transported north.*

Egypt was hard pressed *by Italy and Germany's Axis forces, who came within 250 kilometres of Cairo. As Egypt's former colonial power, Britain was responsible for most of the country's defences, but the Egyptian Air Force contributed patrols as it did here around the Pyramids.*

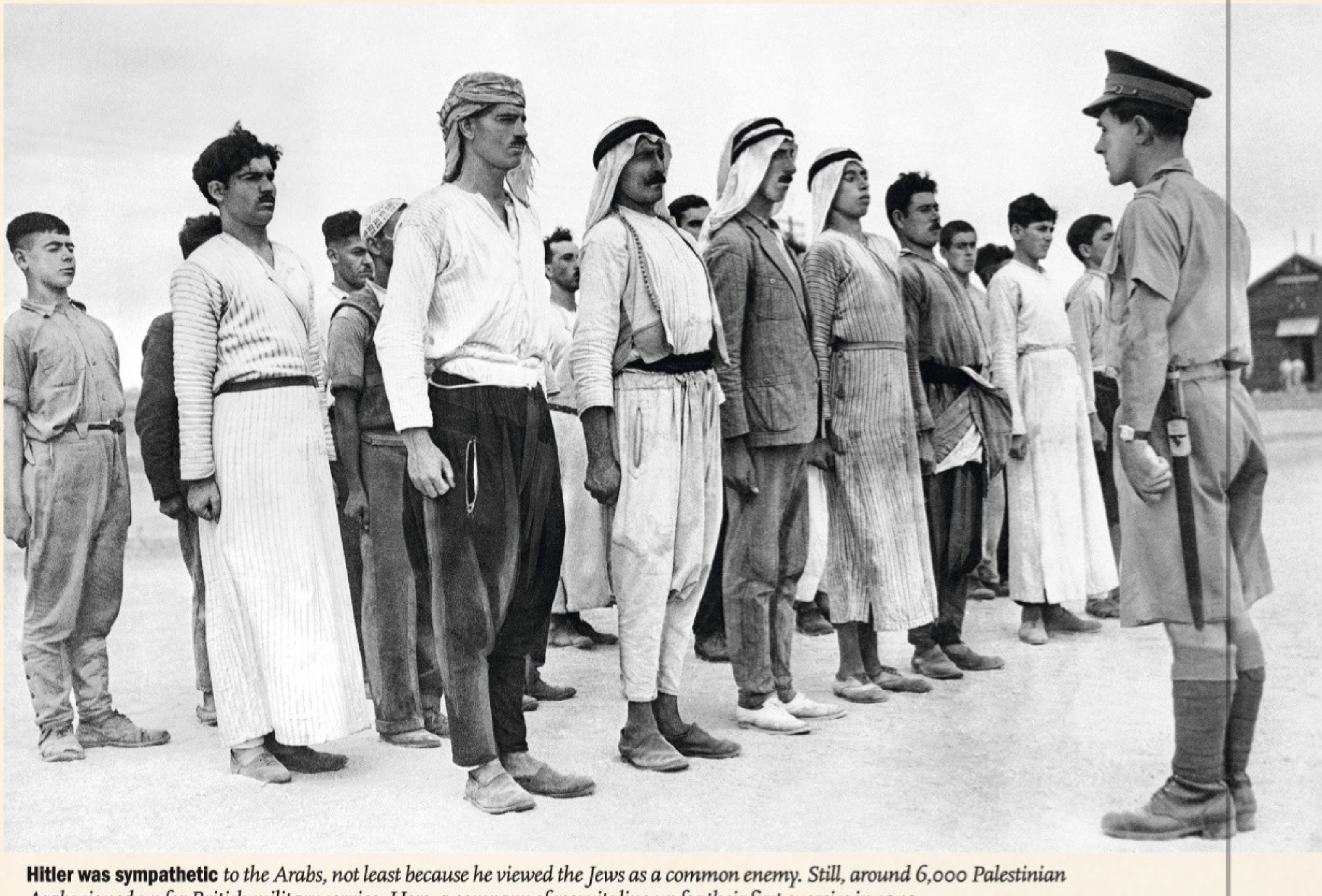


Jewish women *manufacture ammunition at a factory in Palestine in April 1942. Many Jews were eager to support the Allied war effort because of Nazi Germany's widespread persecution of Jews.*



"The blood of your brothers *cries out to you – enlist!" was the call to arms from this Palestinian poster.*

Sten guns *were produced in large numbers at Jewish factories in Palestine. The submachine gun was particularly popular with partisans.*



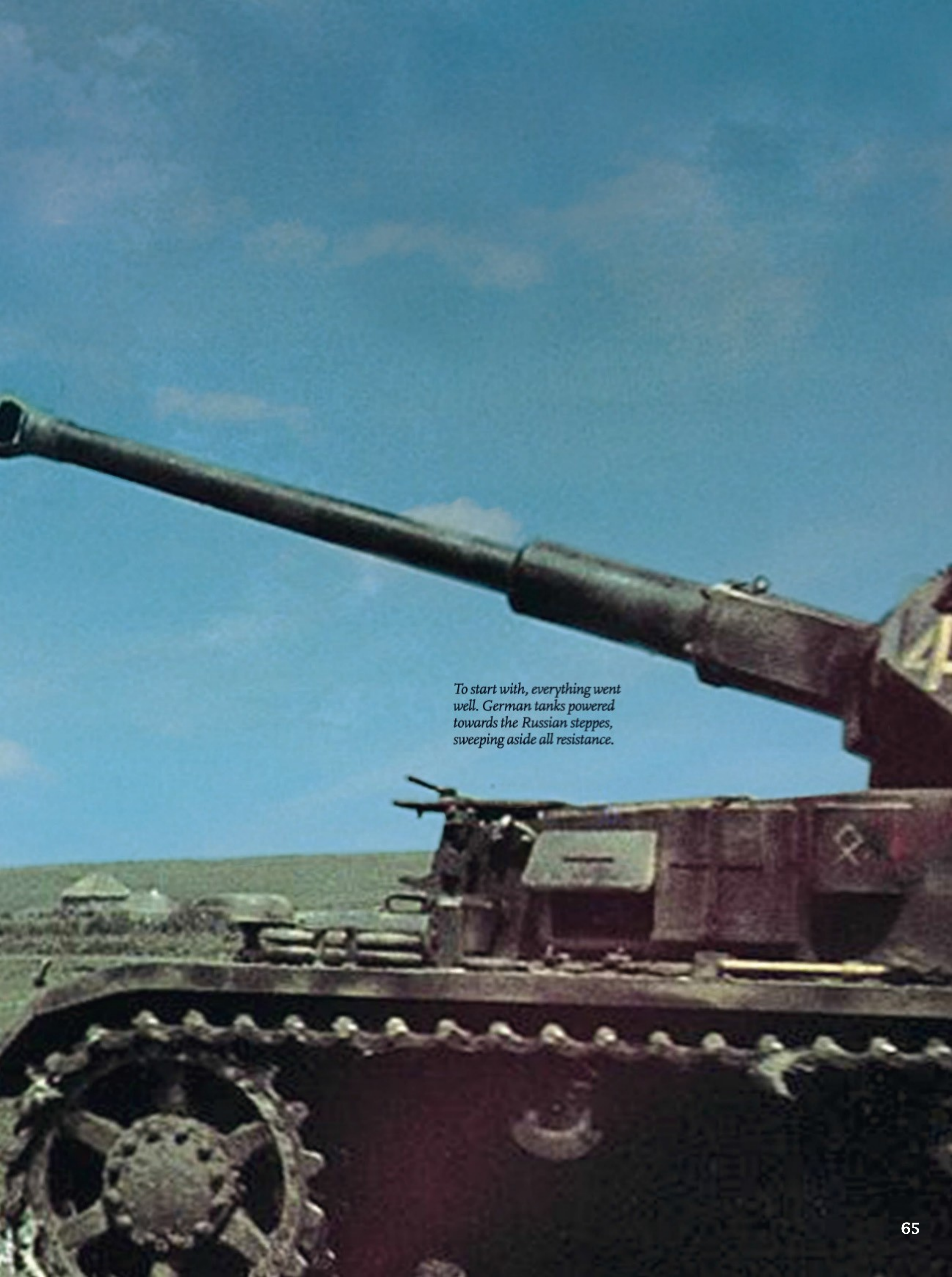
Hitler was sympathetic *to the Arabs, not least because he viewed the Jews as a common enemy. Still, around 6,000 Palestinian Arabs signed up for British military service. Here, a company of recruits line up for their first exercise in 1940.*

HITLER TRIUMPHS OVER RED ARMY

In June 1941, Hitler launches a surprise attack on the Soviet Union. 3.7 million soldiers storm over the border in an incredible display of German Blitzkrieg, but Stalin's enormous empire turns out to be a tough nut to crack, even for the usually victorious invading forces.

1941

22ND JUNE



To start with, everything went well. German tanks powered towards the Russian steppes, sweeping aside all resistance.

THE STAGE IS SET

Moscow
Soviet Union
Berlin
Germany

World War II has been raging for two years. From Norway to the Balkans, Europe has been occupied by German troops, and Hitler now looks to the east. The Nazis are ready for their showdown against Communism and the Soviets; 3.7 million soldiers are prepared for the invasion, history's largest ever military operation.

The sky above Lieutenant Siegfried Knappe's observation post was already growing lighter as daybreak approached. It was 03.14 on 22nd June – the longest day of the year was about to begin. The smell of pine needles hung in the air at the German-Soviet border in the middle of what – until 1939 – had been Poland.

The calm was not to last. Knappe had spent most of the night inspecting his troops, who now stood ready with their loaded guns. But they were by no means the only ones awake at that hour. Along a 1,800-kilometre line that stretched from the Baltic in the north to Romania in the south, millions of German soldiers were ready for battle. The men checked their watches, inspected their weapons one last time, and thought of their families as their sharpened senses picked out the first birdsong of the day.

A moment later, the tension broke. While the Luftwaffe headed for targets behind the Red Army's lines, the artillery received orders to open fire. Along the entire front, thousands of German guns launched a bombardment. Black and yellow smoke filled the air, and the stench of gunpowder reached the German officer's nostrils. For 15 merciless minutes, the thunder of firing guns filled the air. Then Knappe heard the "pop" of a flare, and the morning sky turned red.

Knappe's artillery ceased firing. Now it was the turn of the infantry, which launched its assault on the Soviet outposts. The dreaded German tanks would soon follow – the vanguard of Operation Barbarossa, Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union.

With 3.7 million German, Finnish, Italian, Romanian, Slovak and Hungarian soldiers, the invasion was the largest military operation the world had ever seen. After just a few weeks of fighting, victory seemed inevitable – yet another example of the frightening power of German Blitzkrieg.

As in Poland in 1939 and France in 1940, the German Panzer divisions hammered deeply into enemy territory, while the Luftwaffe removed all obstacles in front of them. City after city fell against the overwhelming force.

Hitler's aim was to eradicate Communism

The Nazi leader had already described his dream of crushing the Soviet Union in his two-volume *Mein Kampf*, published in 1925-26. Communism had to be destroyed, the Slavic people subjugated, and the wide-open plains of the east given over to German colonisation. The planning of Operation Barbarossa

WINTERSCHLACHT
IM OSTEN
1941/42

The 1942 medal was awarded to Germans who had participated in the first winter of the campaign.

began in secrecy in the summer of 1940. At that point, Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union were bound to each other by treaty. The two regimes were ideological opposites, but 1939's Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact saw them sign a non-aggression treaty, and agree to divide up central Europe between them.

The deal with Stalin had ensured peace on Germany's eastern border while Hitler invaded Poland and subjugated Western Europe, but by halfway through 1940, it had served its purpose. Hitler decided to break the agreement with the Soviet Union, as he'd done with other treaties. Now, in one stroke, he wanted to eliminate Communism and destroy the last remaining power that stood between him and his total domination of Europe. Victory over the Soviet Union would also give him control of Ukraine's huge agricultural output and an endless flow of oil from the Caucasus.

Preparations for Operation Barbarossa took place in an atmosphere of complacency among the German General Staff. That spring, Germany had defeated the French army – considered the best in the world – in just six weeks. Hitler and his generals were counting on an even easier victory in the Soviet Union, because according to Nazi ideology, they would be facing subhuman Slavs *(untermensch)*.

The Red Army had merely confirmed this prejudice with its incompetent efforts in the winter war – 500,000 men had attacked Finland in November 1939, but the campaign was a disaster. Stalin's troops suffered one humiliating defeat after another against the stubborn Finns. Only its huge numerical advantage secured the Soviet Union a modest victory four months later. The Germans' arrogance led to a plan of attack that placed huge demands on the German war machine. Generals ignored the fact that factories couldn't possibly deliver tanks in the quantities required and that supplies wouldn't be able to keep up if the armoured divisions advanced as fast and as far as the operational plans dictated.

Problems in the Balkans delayed the attack on the Soviets. Hitler's Italian allies had invaded Greece, but the campaign was a shambles. Mussolini's forces were sent packing as the Greeks received British reinforcements. Operation Barbarossa had to be postponed from 15th May 1941 to 22nd June to give the Wehrmacht (German armed forces) time to clean up the chaos in the Balkans.

Hitler and his generals thought that the Red Army was inept, and the campaign would last no more than six weeks.

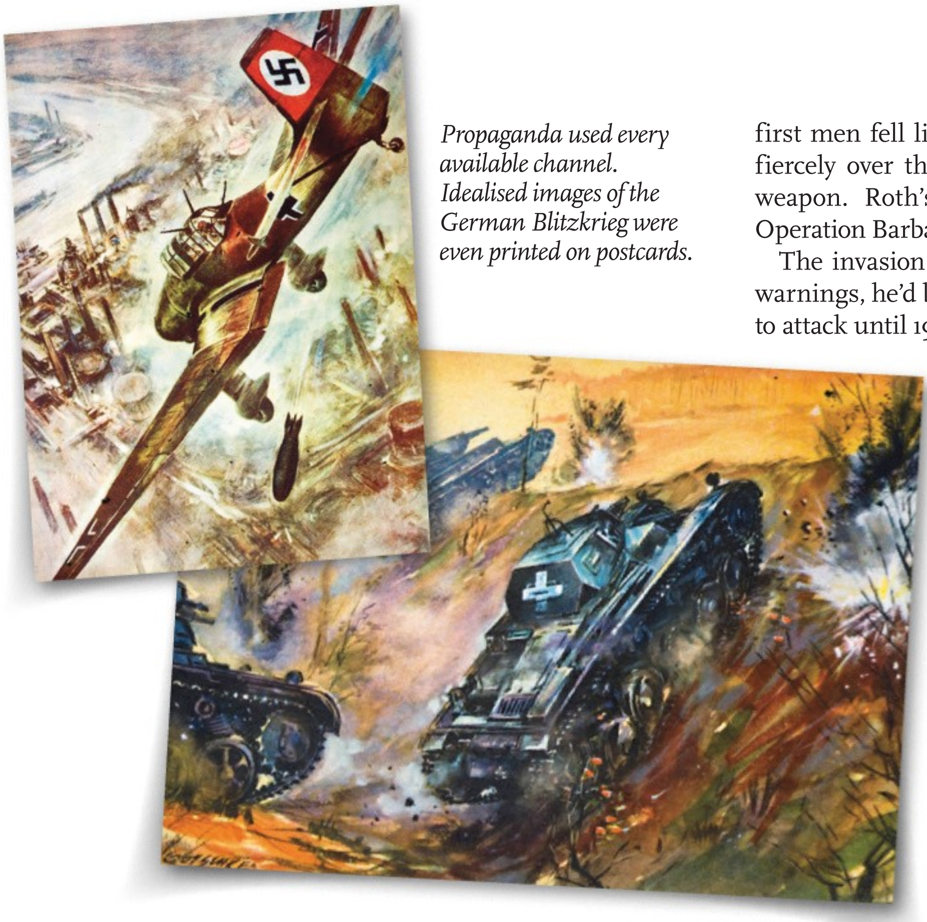
Eight days before Barbarossa was launched, Hitler held court with the military's top brass at the Reich Chancellery in Berlin. He listened to his generals' plans before giving his own assessment: the Red Army would put up a strong defence, but the campaign would be over in six weeks.

GERMANS SNEAKED UP TO THE BORDER

While dignitaries in Berlin toasted their plans with champagne, life as he knew it was about to end for Hans Roth. The 28-year-old soldier had to leave his comfortable garrison life in the south-eastern Polish city of Zamosc, with its beautiful market place and opulent baroque mansions.

His unit had been ordered to move down to the River Bug, to spy on the Soviet border defences. On the far bank of the slow-moving waterway, he could see the Soviet Union's red flag, with its hammer and sickle, flying above the forest trees. Bunkers and machine-gun nests were less

The German army was mostly comprised of infantry, which advanced – as troops have done for centuries – on foot.



Propaganda used every available channel. Idealised images of the German Blitzkrieg were even printed on postcards.

than 100 metres away. If an overzealous Soviet guard spotted the patrol, he'd be able to shoot down Roth and his comrades in an instant: "Are we the scapegoats who are supposed to be slaughtered by the Russians [as an excuse] for the German attack?" he noted with suspicion in his diary.

Roth's patrol crept under cover of vegetation along the riverbank to map out the Soviet positions. From the other side of the water, the sound of armoured vehicles could be heard.

"The Reds have strengthened their positions," Roth concluded. "They appear to have rolled their tanks into position." It seemed the Soviets expected trouble.

Roth was anxious about the reception that awaited them on the other side of the Bug, but he was in no doubt that Germany would prevail once things kicked off, because the forest behind him was quietly being filled with German tanks, artillery and lots and lots of soldiers. Rumours of attack dates spread among the soldiers on the front line. On 19th June, Roth noted in his diary: "Hurray! The greatest battle of all times will begin tomorrow!" He was as sure of victory as Hitler.

However, the attack didn't begin until 22nd June. At 03.15, gunfire lit up the morning sky, while Roth and his comrades, pale and tense, huddled together in their foxholes. Soon the infantry would cross the river and pave the way for the Panzer divisions to advance into the Soviet hinterland.

5.7 million

Soviet soldiers ended up in German captivity, where they were sent on endless marches without food or water. Between 2.7 and 3.3 million died before the war ended.

STALIN WAS TAKEN BY SURPRISE

The minutes dragged by. Then, at 03.30 exactly, a whistle finally blew – the signal! Hans Roth jumped out of his foxhole and sprinted 20 metres to the inflatable boats that had been brought down to the riverbank under cover of darkness. The soldiers quickly reached the far side, but now faced a Soviet machine gun. Gunfire crackled as the first men fell lifeless to the ground. The Germans fought fiercely over the barbed-wire barricades and silenced the weapon. Roth's group headed for the bunkers ahead. Operation Barbarossa was underway.

The invasion came as a shock to Stalin. Despite several warnings, he'd believed that the Germans wouldn't be ready to attack until 1942 at the earliest; in fact, the Soviet dictator thought they might never attack. Stalin was distrustful by nature, but was convinced that his counterpart in Berlin was too dependent on Soviet resources to start a war. Over the past two years, Soviet supplies of oil, minerals and food had kept the Wehrmacht and Germany's war production industries running. It never occurred to Stalin that Hitler would take control of the precious resources by force.

The Red Army was in the middle of a major reorganisation and was caught off guard. During the first day of operations, the Luftwaffe destroyed 1,811 aircraft, 1,489 of which were on the ground. As the German infantry advanced, they encountered illuminated outposts, which were even decorated with portraits of Stalin and red flags. Few Soviet units had sharpened their readiness in response to the rumours of German troop movements. Many bunkers were neither complete nor fully manned, and there was a lack of weapons everywhere. Soviet reservists were rushed to the front line. Russian police officer Nikolai Yangchuk was posted to Brest (now in Belarus), a little north of where Hans Roth had crossed the river earlier in the morning. Here, he experienced a typical scene when 1,000 men arrived at the train station.

"Don't we get any rifles?" asked the newly arrived soldiers.

"Get to the front," they were told. "You will find some weapons there." The troops had no option but to advance unarmed. At their posts, they had to wait until someone else was hit so they could take their weapon.

The garrison at Brest's old citadel was just as poorly prepared to withstand the German attack. The 19th century fortress could, on paper, accommodate 8,000 Soviet soldiers, but on the morning of 22nd June, just 3,500 men were present. Nikitina Archinowa was married to a Russian officer and lived in one of the garrison's forts.

She was abruptly awoken by the sound of exploding bombs and grenades. She threw on a coat and hurried out on to the street with her children, where she stopped to take in the nightmarish scene. German bombers swarmed overhead, dropping bombs on the fortress. Men, women and children ran around in confusion, seeking cover. On the ground in front of Archinowa lay a young woman and her son. They were dead.

EVERYTHING WENT TO PLAN

Operation Barbarossa's strategy was to attack along three axes. Army Group North was to advance through the Baltic countries, heading for Leningrad. At the opposite end of the front, Army Group South was ready to conquer Ukraine, the Soviet Union's breadbasket. Between the two stood Army Group Centre.

With over half of the German Panzer divisions deployed there, Army Group Centre could advance faster and further than the other two groups. At Moscow, the tanks would turn north and south, and penetrate deep behind the Soviet units that faced Army Groups North and South. The Red Army would be surrounded and destroyed.

Military plans rarely survive the harsh realities of the battlefield, but in its first weeks, Operation Barbarossa ran like clockwork. Once again, the armoured divisions outmanoeuvred an enemy that, on paper, was stronger.

The Red Army had more tanks, more planes and more guns. Even the new Soviet T-34 fighter turned out to be far better than anything the Germans had in their arsenal. Only the German infantry surpassed its opponents in terms of numbers. But the Wehrmacht's real strength lay in its training, experience and effective radio communications. The Soviets had only a few radios and most tanks communicated using flags.

Operation Barbarossa followed the standard template for Blitzkrieg, which had been thoroughly tested in Poland and France. In just a few days, Army Group Centre surrounded the Belarusian cities of Bialystok and Minsk, cutting off over 300,000 Soviet soldiers. Panzer divisions left them to the German infantry and advanced rapidly towards Smolensk. By mid-July, the city was surrounded, and two weeks later, the last pockets of resistance were suppressed.

The list of German-captured cities grew almost daily: Sithomir, Chernobyl, Uman, Velikie Luki and Tallinn fell, and Leningrad and Kiev were quickly surrounded, too.

БРЕСТСКАЯ КРЕПОСТЬ

This badge honoured Soviet troops who fought in 1941-45.

DISASTER LOOMED

Despite the tally of German triumphs, serious problems began to emerge. Had Operation Barbarossa been planned with less complacency, Hitler and his generals could have foreseen them. The German infantry was constantly struggling to keep up with the advancing Panzer divisions. The soldiers awoke in the middle of the night and marched until late in the evening – usually in roadside fields, to keep out of the way of the long columns of motor vehicles. With blood-shot eyes, cracked lips, and faces smeared with sweat and dust, they pressed onward – 30, 40, 50, even 60 kilometres a day in the summer heat, carrying weapons and heavy backpacks. Every once in a while, the march was interrupted by intense fighting.

"It's getting serious now," Hans Roth wrote in his diary on 13th July. For the first time in days, he'd had a few hours of uninterrupted sleep. Like many of the millions of German soldiers heading east, he was totally exhausted: "I could cry out of anger and frustration. Nothing works

1878-1953

NAME **JOSEPH STALIN**

TITLE GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE SOVIET UNION

Peasant's son became a dictator

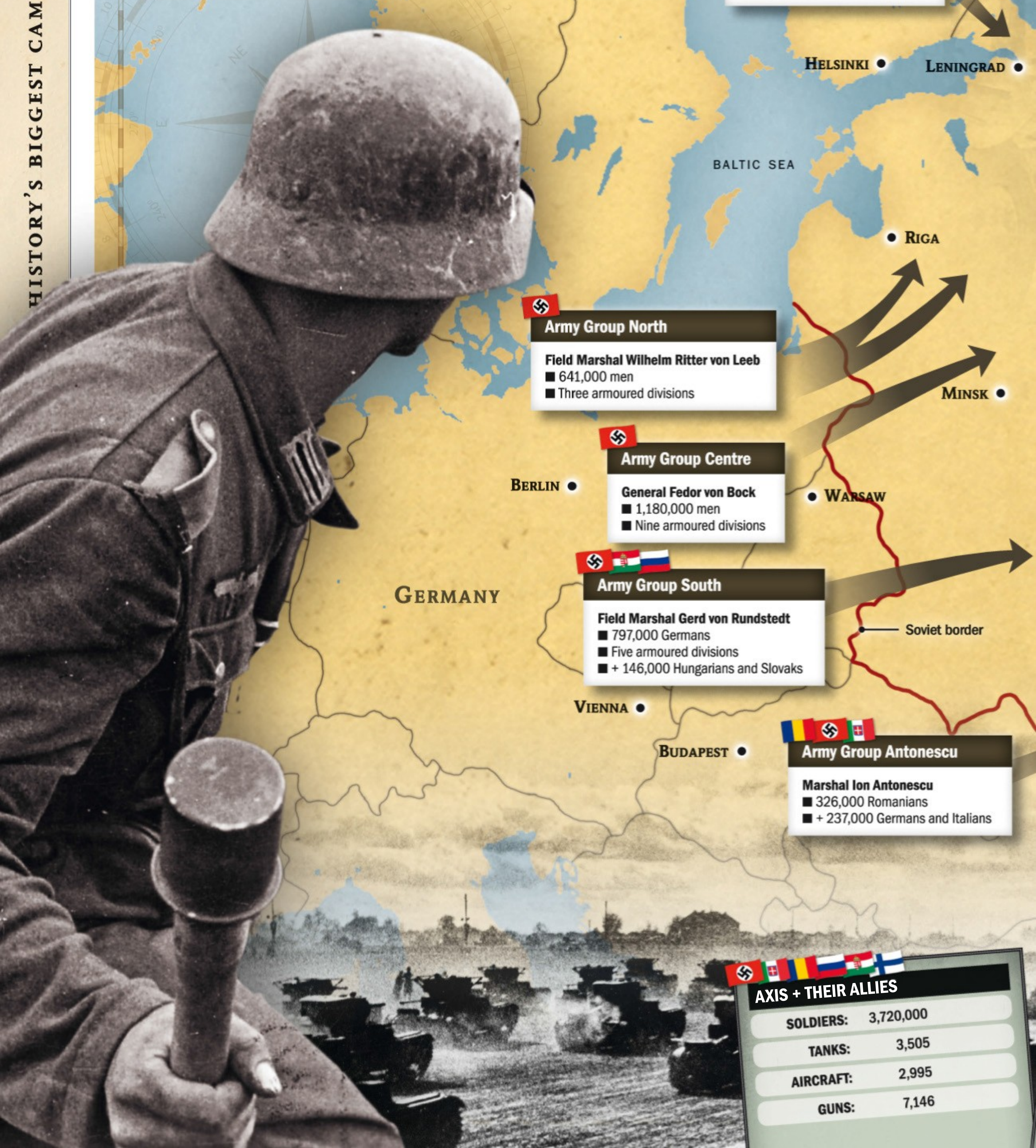
The Soviet Union's notorious dictator was born into a poor peasant family. His mother made sure that 15-year-old Joseph attended a seminary, but shortly before his final exam, Stalin left school to devote himself to political work. He joined the Bolsheviks in 1904 under Vladimir Lenin's leadership. After Lenin's death, Stalin took over the leadership of the party, and from the late 1920s, gradually secured absolute power as dictator of the Soviet Union. But the more power Stalin gained, the more paranoid he became.

During the 1930s, he had all of his political opponents in the party executed, many on false charges. Indiscriminate purges followed – the military lost nearly 40,000 officers and millions of civilians were sent to labour camps. The army cleansings meant that the Soviet Union was practically defenceless when the Germans attacked in 1941. Stalin's tactics, therefore, were to concentrate the army's efforts on major cities, allowing the German invasion forces to reach so far into the Soviet Union that they had difficulty obtaining supplies. He left the final defeat of the Germans to the Russian winter.

- **Abandoned the priesthood in favour of a political career.**
- **Responsible for the deaths of some 55 million Soviet citizens.**

Rapid German offensive forced Soviets back

Stalin's armies had as many tanks, aircraft and guns, but the Wehrmacht was experienced and led by skilled generals. The Germans quickly penetrated deep into the Soviet Union.


Helsinki
Leningrad
Baltic Sea
Riga
Minsk
Berlin
Warsaw
Germany
Soviet border
Vienna
Budapest

German troops

Colonel General Nikolaus von Falkenhorst
- 90,000 Germans in northern Finland

Finnish army

Marshal Carl Gustaf Mannerheim
- 303,000 Finns

Army Group North

Field Marshal Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb
- 641,000 men
- Three armoured divisions

Army Group Centre

General Fedor von Bock
- 1,180,000 men
- Nine armoured divisions

Army Group South

Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt
- 797,000 Germans
- Five armoured divisions
- + 146,000 Hungarians and Slovaks

Army Group Antonescu

Marshal Ion Antonescu
- 326,000 Romanians
- + 237,000 Germans and Italians

AXIS + THEIR ALLIES

SOLDIERS:	3,720,000
TANKS:	3,505
AIRCRAFT:	2,995
GUNS:	7,146

Moscow
Kiev
Soviet Union
Odessa
Black Sea

All three German army groups and an allied army group under Romanian command advanced deep into the Soviet Union in just a few months.

Leningrad Military District

General Markian Popov
■ 426,000 men

Baltic Military District

General Fyodor Kuznetsov
■ Approx 500,000 men

Western Military District

General Dmitry Pavlov
■ 647,000 men

Kiev Military District

General Mikhail Kirponos
■ 870,000 men

Odessa Military District

General Ivan Tjulenev
■ 320,000 men

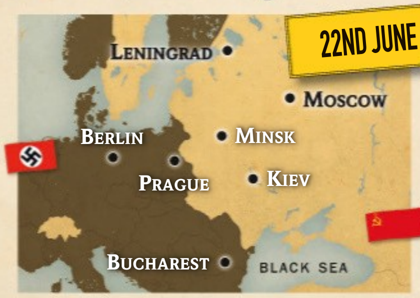
THE RED ARMY

SOLDIERS:	2,763,000
TANKS:	14,000
AIRCRAFT:	7,133
GUNS:	34,700

Operation Barbarossa begins

22ND JUNE

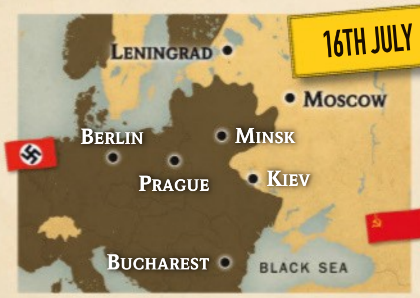
The Luftwaffe destroys 1,811 Soviet planes on the first day – 25 percent of Stalin's aircraft in Europe. **Army Group North** marches along the Baltic coast to Leningrad, fighting all resistance in its path.


Leningrad
Moscow
Berlin
Minsk
Prague
Kiev
Bucharest
Black Sea

Road opens to Moscow

16TH JULY

Army Group Centre surrounds Minsk and captures a large Soviet force. The road to Moscow now lies open, but Hitler divides the army in two and sends them north and south instead.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Berlin
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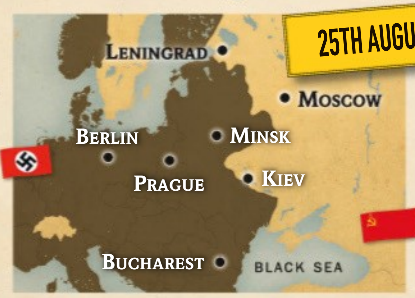
Prague
Kiev
Bucharest
Black Sea

Army halts before Leningrad

25TH AUGUST

Forest and marshland delay **Army Group North's** advance towards Leningrad. Just outside the city, the offensive stops. Leningrad won't be stormed, but its inhabitants will be starved to death instead.


Leningrad
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Kiev
Bucharest
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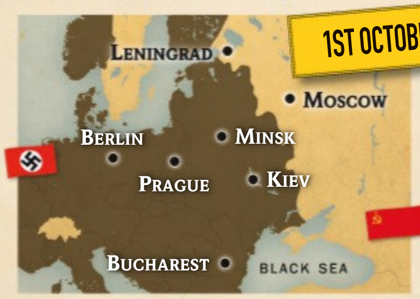
Kiev caught in German trap

1ST OCTOBER

The Red Army has gathered around 600,000 men at Kiev, and **Army Group South** traps them between two armoured divisions. Over 100,000 Soviet soldiers surrender to the Germans.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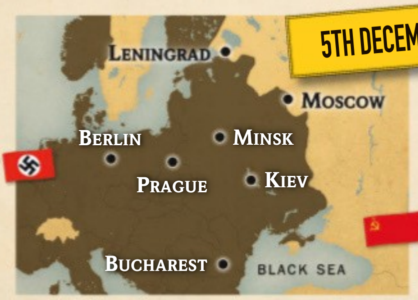
Prague
Kiev
Bucharest
Black Sea

Attack stalls

5TH DECEMBER

Army Group North is outside Leningrad, while the Red Army halts **Army Group Centre** just kilometres from Moscow. In Ukraine, **Army Group South** occupies all of southern Crimea except Sevastopol.


Leningrad
Moscow
Berlin
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Bucharest
Black Sea

anymore. My body does not want to co-operate any longer. My nerves are singing like the wires of a telegraph. Will I ever see my home again?"

The Battle for Brest was an ominous sign for the Germans. Their armoured divisions were already rolling into Smolensk, over 600 km to the east, when the fortress finally fell on 30th July 1941. By that time, the Soviet garrison had held out for six weeks. The German 45th Infantry Division had entered the old fortress on 22nd June, but was met by deadly fire from snipers in basement windows, on roofs and in trees. The attackers withdrew that night after losing 311 men, equivalent to two-thirds of the division's total losses during the campaign in France the previous year. The siege tied up a huge number of German soldiers, preventing them from participating in the advance to the east.

Collaborators in the Soviet Union often ended up being shot by their countrymen. Groups of partisans resisted the occupation and punished anyone who helped the Germans.

GERMANS WERE "BLONDE BEASTS"

The German losses grew with alarming speed, because despite the confusion that reigned among the Red Army's leadership, Stalin's troops fought fiercely for every centimetre of Soviet soil. When the Germans crossed the Dubysa river in Lithuania and secured two bridgeheads on the other side, they were forced back by desperate counter-attacks that night. German units recaptured the bridgeheads the following day, which is when they realised how brutal the battle on the Eastern Front would be. The Red Army had left several German corpses with their eyes gouged out or their genitals cut off.

The central buildings in Kiev were mined and blown up as the Germans entered the city.

Security behind the front was a growing problem. While the armoured divisions enabled the German war machine to capture vast tracts of land, the forests were still full of Soviet partisans and isolated groups of soldiers. They concentrated their efforts on ambushing vulnerable German supply columns, whose cargo was badly needed at the front.

"We are losing more people to the bandits than in the fighting itself," a German soldier wrote in a letter home to his family in early July 1941.

These partisan attacks gave Hitler a pretext for embarking on a war of annihilation. The German high command ordered that the local population be terrorised to such an extent that "it loses all will to resist". A Minsk citizen later described the Germans' treatment of civilians: "There were SS and police patrols day and night with sudden house searches. People were arrested on the slightest pretext, disappearing into Gestapo cellars and then whisked off to be shot. An atmosphere of constant fear reigned in the city."

Alongside the harsh regime, looting became part of everyday life on the Eastern Front. When the supply lines failed, German soldiers simply took what they needed. Eggs, flour, fruit and horses disappeared, and much else was just destroyed.

In a reversal of Nazi race theory, Stalin's propaganda labelled the Germans "blonde beasts"; Hitler's Aryan troops weren't superhuman, but bloodthirsty barbarians.

CITY BECAME A DEADLY TRAP

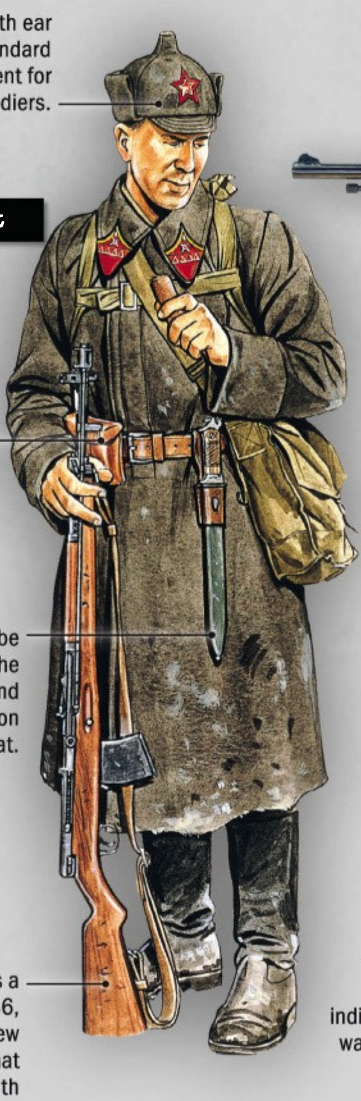
The Red Army couldn't halt the Germans' progress, but before they retreated, the Soviets laid traps for the

Ukrainian farmers burned their crops, leaving no food for the German invasion forces.

The Red Army's soldiers were easy to spot

The Soviet army was the world's largest, but its uniforms were impractical and colourful, with large, red emblems. In 1941, they were replaced with khaki combat dress.

Officers of the Red Army wore a cap with a red band and green crown.



Wool cap with ear flaps was standard winter equipment for Soviet soldiers.

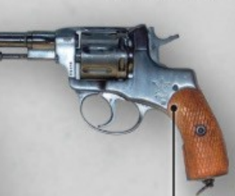
Sergeant

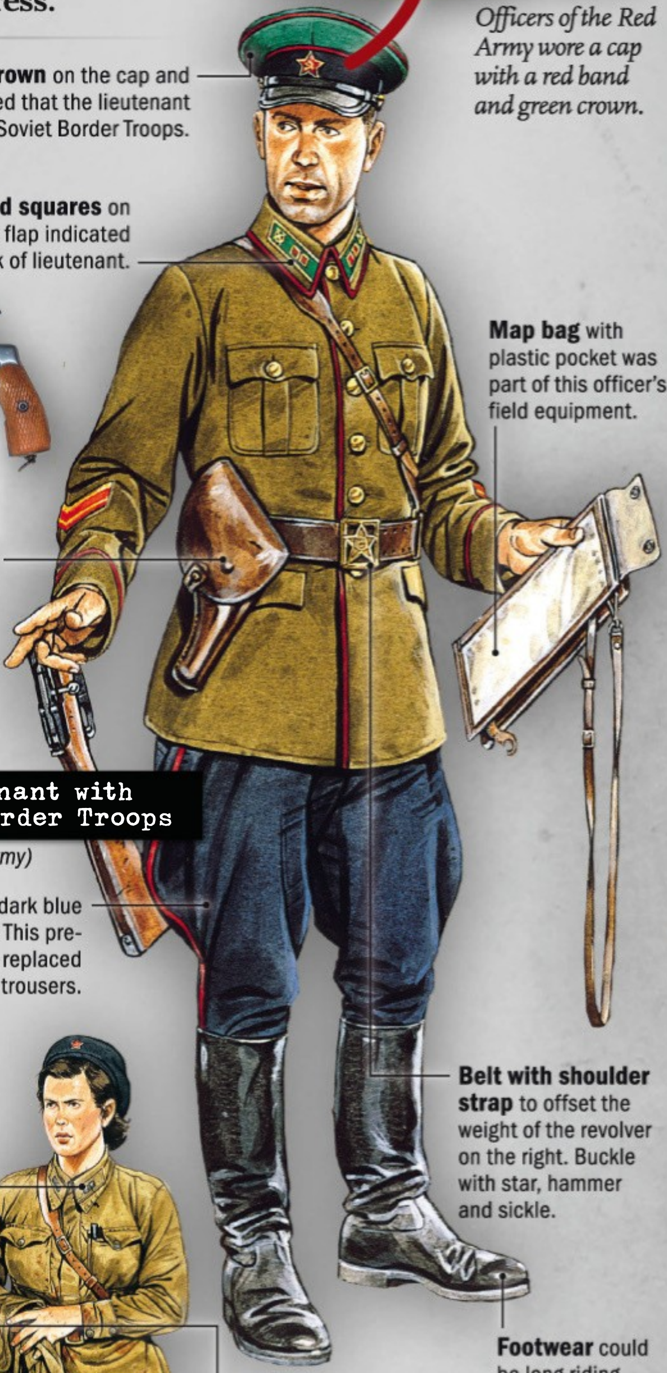
(The Red Army, rifle regiment)

Ammunition was carried in a leather pouch on the rifleman's belt.

Bayonet could be mounted on the rifle barrel and used as a weapon in close combat.

Rifle was a Simonov AVS-36, one of the few Soviet rifles that could be fitted with a bayonet.





The bright green crown on the cap and collar insignia showed that the lieutenant was in the Soviet Border Troops.

Two red squares on each collar flap indicated the rank of lieutenant.

Map bag with plastic pocket was part of this officer's field equipment.

Holster held a Nagant revolver with seven shots. The gun was used from 1895 until the 1950s.

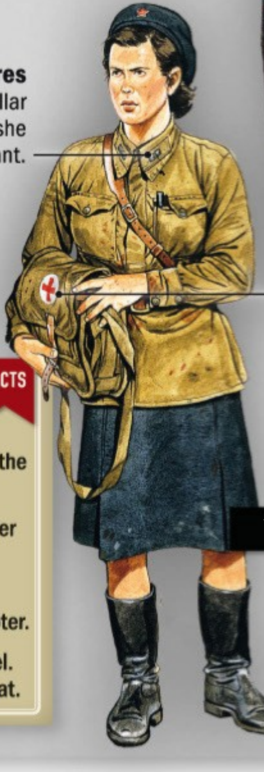
Lieutenant with Soviet Border Troops

(The Red Army)

Trousers were dark blue with red stripes. This pre-war uniform was replaced with khaki trousers.

Belt with shoulder strap to offset the weight of the revolver on the right. Buckle with star, hammer and sickle.

Footwear could be long riding boots or shoes.



Two squares on the collar indicated that she was a lieutenant.

The red cross indicated that it was a medical bag.

Female lieutenant

(The Red Army, medical corps)

Weapons were not standard equipment for female doctors in 1941. They were armed later in the war.

FACTS

ONE IN TEN SOLDIERS FEMALE

- **Approximately 800,000** women were engaged in active service in the Red Army. In 1943, that equated to 8–10 percent of Soviet soldiers.
- **Three flight regiments** consisted solely of women. One was a fighter regiment, the other two were bomber regiments.
- **Sniper** roles were considered suitable for women by the Soviet regime. With 309 kills, Ludmila Pavlichenko was the most sharpshooter.
- **During the war,** tanks had more and more women behind the wheel. T-34 driver Mariya Oktyabrskaya was mortally wounded during combat.

The Red Army was equipped with the classic Russian Maxim-Sokolov machine gun. It was developed back in 1910, but its excellent durability and reliability meant the gun was kept in use until 1945. It was mounted on wheels and was therefore easy to move around.

invading forces. The soldiers in Roth's unit suspected as much when they marched into Ukraine's capital on 19th September 1941. Kiev's city centre was deserted. The wide boulevards and large open spaces were empty, the silence oppressive. Hans Roth felt the hairs on the back of his neck rise. He feared a trap – that the tranquillity would be broken by the snarl of machine-gun fire or the blast of explosives.

For three days, the German soldiers had negotiated trap after trap on their way to the city. On top of constant fire from the Red Army, they encountered buried mines, live wires and hidden flamethrowers, all triggered by a careless step.

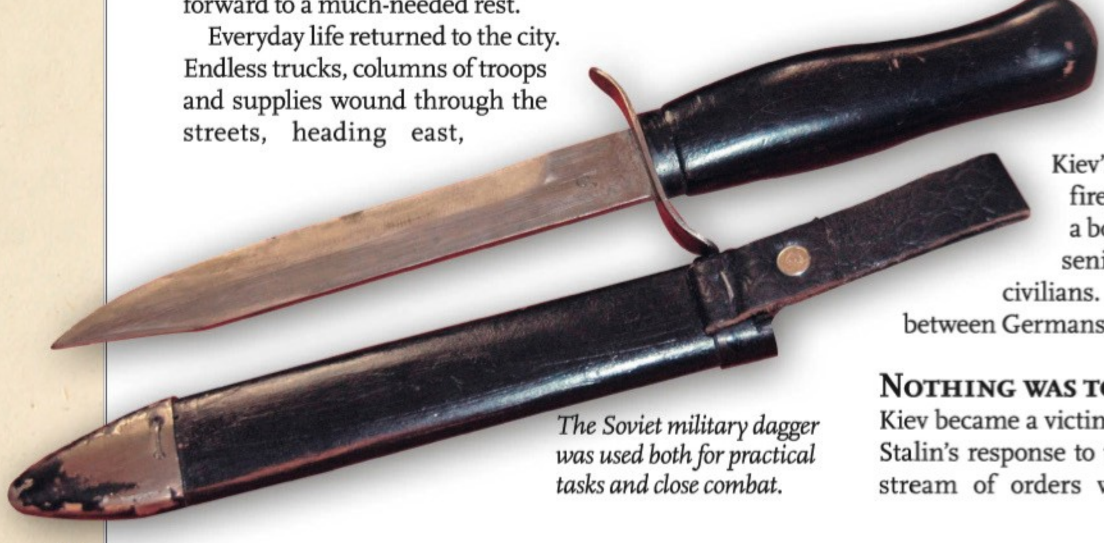
These experiences left Roth and his comrades believing they wouldn't be able to take Kiev without a fight. But everything remained quiet, and the German troops moved in unopposed. Instead of fighting, the soldiers could look forward to a much-needed rest.

Everyday life returned to the city. Endless trucks, columns of troops and supplies wound through the streets, heading east, while Kiev's remaining citizens cautiously emerged from where they had been hiding in their cellars. The streets were filled with people and the atmosphere was almost peaceful.

Suddenly, the city was shaken by a massive explosion, throwing rubble and iron girders into the air. Everywhere was chaos. Terrified citizens fled in all directions; several were trampled in the panic. When the dust settled, Hans Roth could see the extent of the devastation: a 100-metre-wide crater had replaced a statue of Lenin, and the walls of two nearby buildings had collapsed. The search for more bombs started immediately. Roth was part of a group sent to scour the Ukrainian National Museum.

In a small room in the basement, they heard an ominous ticking. The sound was coming through the wall, and for 30 nerve-wracking minutes, the Germans tried to reach the bomb. Then they were ordered to evacuate the building.

That evening, the museum was rocked by an explosion, and similar blasts were heard elsewhere in the city. Kiev's night sky was illuminated by the many fires ignited by the explosives. The next day, a bomb at the Grand Hotel killed a group of senior German officers as well as many civilians. Stalin's booby traps didn't differentiate between Germans and Soviet citizens.



The Soviet military dagger was used both for practical tasks and close combat.

Nothing was to fall into enemy hands

Kiev became a victim of the systematic destruction that was Stalin's response to the German invasion on 22nd June. A stream of orders was issued from the Soviet leader's office. Among them was a directive on 24th June establishing a Council for Evacuation. It was to have a decisive influence on the outcome of the war on the Eastern Front. The Council was tasked with moving 2,500 factories and 20 million people to safety, east of Moscow. Hitler was hoping for a speedy German victory, but Stalin expected a lengthy showdown, where the availability of resources would determine the outcome. He had already written off the entire western part of the Soviet Union, now it was time to move as many of the Soviets' production facilities as possible before they fell into Nazi hands.

Three days later, the Council was ready with a directive for the movement of people: "Professional workers, engineers, clerks employed in the plants being evacuated, military-age youngsters, senior civil servants, and party functionaries."

The decree also determined what should be done with any resources that couldn't be moved: "All valuable property, raw material and supplies that cannot be moved and that the enemy could make use of must be destroyed, liquidated and burned."

The directive marked the beginning of the Soviets' scorched-earth policy, aimed at slowing the German advance. Nowhere was harder hit than Kiev. Even before the enemy marched in and planted the swastika flag in the city, a power plant, four bridges across the Dnieper River, a huge food store, a cannery and the city's water tower were all blown up. Large quantities of flour, sugar, salt and medicine were poured into the river.

No room for cowards

Throughout the 1930s, Stalin had driven millions of people into forced labour to build his communist industrial paradise, and collectivised agriculture had condemned millions more to starvation. In his show of strength against Hitler, he was willing to pile more hardship upon his citizens' shoulders. The Soviet leader announced his intentions in a radio address on 3rd July:

"Comrades! Citizens! Brothers and sisters! Men of our army and navy! I'm addressing you, my friends," he began jovially, after which he explained how he intended to turn lives upside down: "There must be no room for whimperers and cowards, for panic-mongers and deserters." Everyone had to submit to the war effort, for the battle was "our patriotic war of liberation, our war against the Fascist enslavers".

As German forces advanced, Stalin instructed that "all rolling stock must be evacuated, the enemy must not be left a single engine, a single railway car, nor a single pound of grain or gallon of fuel". Farmers must "drive off all their cattle and turn over their grain…for transportation to the rear".

Neither children nor the elderly were mentioned. Nor did Stalin discuss how Soviet citizens behind German lines would survive when food was taken or destroyed. To make matters worse, the Soviet Council for Evacuation prevented people from deciding their own fate. Unauthorised movement was prohibited and only citizens of value to the regime could hope to obtain a coveted travel permit. Thus, the Soviet scorched-earth policy was set in motion, devoid of the official solidarity of communism and characterised by last-minute planning.

Party bosses left

The Soviet regime envisaged an orderly evacuation from the areas under threat near the front. Workers would systematically dismantle machinery at their factories and load it on to trains that would transport both people and equipment to destinations far to the east. Behind them, "destruction battalions" would blow up anything of

Some Soviet citizens preferred Hitler to Stalin

In many places, the German soldiers were seen as liberators. Ethnic minorities, Christians and anti-communists hated the regime in Moscow.

The news of the German invasion sent thousands of people fleeing east – far away from the advancing armoured divisions – but others stayed put, eagerly awaiting the enemy's arrival.

"Whatever the Germans are like," Lydia Osipova wrote in Leningrad on 23rd June, "they won't be worse than what we have." She and her husband abhorred Stalin, and were by no means the only ones.

The Baltic countries had been swallowed up by the Soviet Union in 1940, and here people celebrated Hitler's invasion. The day after Operation Barbarossa began, rebels occupied the radio building in Kaunas and declared Lithuania independent. In Latvia, crowds waved flags and cheered as German troops marched into the capital, Riga, on 1st July.

Stalin was especially despised in Ukraine, where his politics had triggered a famine in 1932–33. More than four million people had died as the regime's food requisitioning took crops from starving peasants. The German soldiers' arrival was a day of celebration.

But enthusiasm for the Germans diminished as it became clear that they had not come as liberators of the oppressed, but as new occupiers. The soldiers had merely replaced one brutal dictator with another.

On their way east, German soldiers were often offered refreshments by friendly locals.

Soviet soldiers examining a collection of captured German weapons.

value that remained and set fire to crops in the fields – with selfless help from the local population. The reality, however, was rather different.

The destruction battalions consisted of party activists supplemented by conscripts and criminals. They carried out their duties without regard to the local people – for example, in Ukraine, 216,000 tonnes of grain went up in flames.

Often, they acted completely indiscriminately. In the industrial town of Zaporizhia, for instance, Stalin's battalions were responsible for two major human tragedies. The town's bakery was blown up without warning, before the last workers had left the site and while citizens still queued outside to buy bread. About 300 people perished.

The city was also hit by a huge tidal wave when a dam on the Dnieper River was destroyed to stop power generation in the area. The water swept all of southern Zaporizhia away, including its inhabitants.

Frequently, factory managers, party officials and soldiers who were helping to organise the evacuations were the first to flee the area – in many cases, with pockets full of stolen goods.

In early August, a report on the chaotic conditions in the Shpolianskii district near the Soviet southern front began: "The evacuation has turned into disorderly flight as a result of a loss of leadership over the population by district organisations. The director of the mill and the head of the fire brigade took flight first.... Many collective- and state-farm chairmen have also taken flight, seizing collective and state resources."

At the same time, many of the "evacuees" were left to make their own way from the threatened areas. When worker Tamara Kokoshkina was suddenly told to leave her rubber-sole factory in Kalinin, outside Moscow, everything happened so quickly that she couldn't reach her designated truck east. Instead, she had to walk along the main road towards the capital, carrying her young son and holding her daughter's hand. Tamara was far from the only one. Large crowds gathered their most essential belongings and fled east, away from the roar of the guns. In the words of the Polish-born author Aleksander Wat, "all of Russia was on the move".

The Soviet security service, NKVD, was in charge of forces at the Soviet border when Germany invaded in 1941. The forces were organised into rifle and cavalry regiments.

SOVIETS KNUCKLED DOWN FOR THEIR COUNTRY

The massive evacuation of workers and machinery allowed the Soviet Union to mass-produce munitions away from Hitler's reach. In Saratov, on the Volga River, workers started manufacturing MiG fighter aircraft even as the factory was still being built around them. The first aircraft left the assembly lines just two weeks after the final parts of the factory were unloaded from trains.

By playing the nationalist card, Stalin succeeded in getting large swathes of the population to support what the regime called the Great Patriotic War. Many citizens worked day and night to keep the forces on the fronts supplied. As far away as Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, the people felt deeply involved in the fight against the Germans, despite being thousands of kilometres from the front.

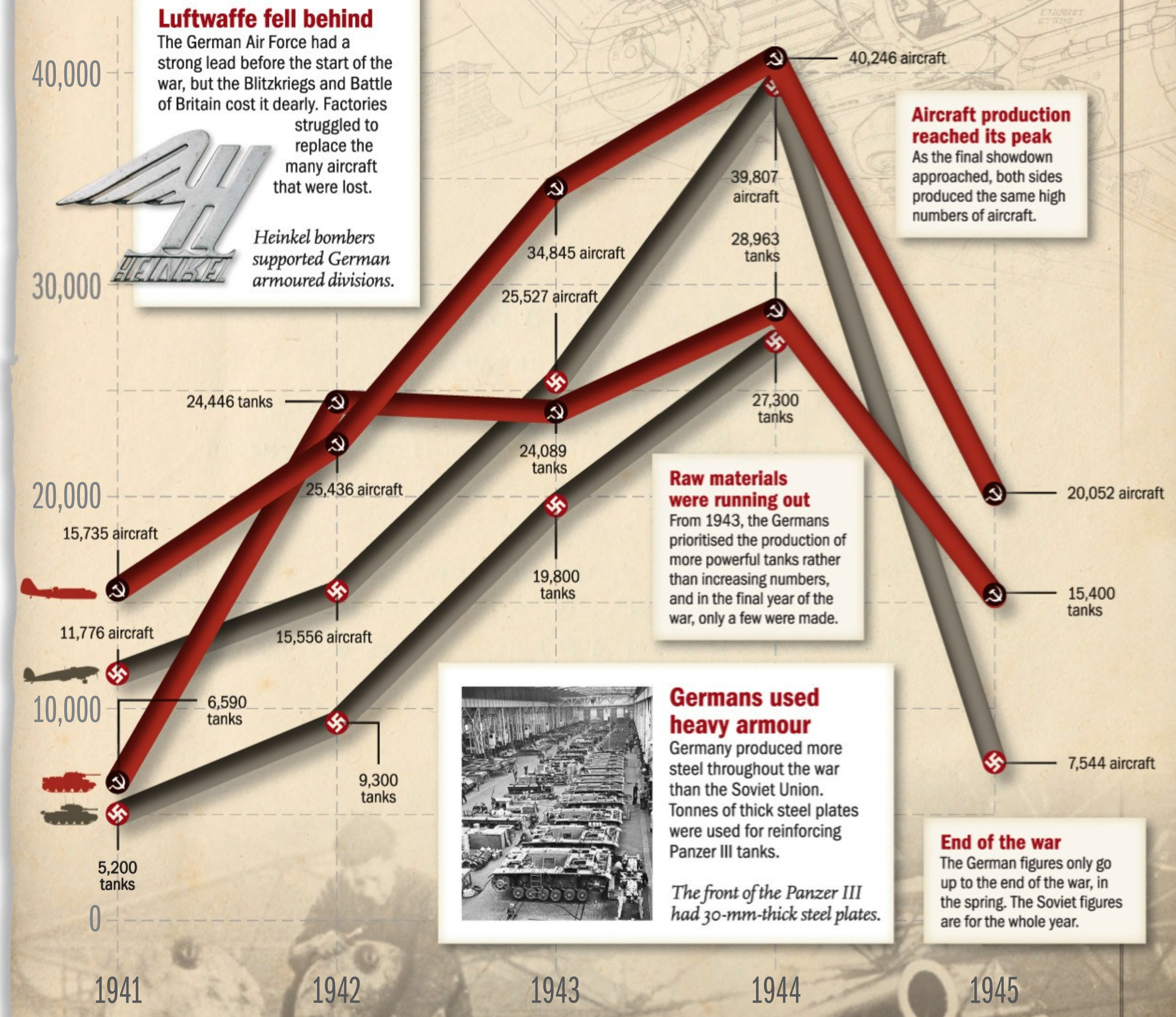
About 90 factories were moved to the area, where locals worked side by side with evacuees, producing everything from fighter jets to Katyusha rocket-launcher batteries and uniforms for the Red Army.

At one factory, nine-year-old Oleg Boldyrev helped make bombs, mines and grenades. He had begged his father to be allowed to help his country and join in with the war effort.

The mobilisation of Soviet industry proved crucial. Thanks to the steady supply of new weapons, the war was not over in six weeks, as Hitler had hoped. Hans Roth and his comrades had to fight on the Eastern Front for another four years. During that time, millions of German soldiers died, including Hans Roth, who fell in combat in Belarus in 1944.

Factories moved to the east

On Stalin's orders, factories in the western part of the Soviet Union were dismantled and sent by rail to the east. By the end of 1941, more than ten million people and 2,500 factories had been moved, and the first planes and tanks rolled off the assembly lines even before factory walls had been rebuilt.



Luftwaffe fell behind

The German Air Force had a strong lead before the start of the war, but the Blitzkriegs and Battle of Britain cost it dearly. Factories struggled to replace the many aircraft that were lost.

Heinkel bombers supported German armoured divisions.

Aircraft production reached its peak

As the final showdown approached, both sides produced the same high numbers of aircraft.

Raw materials were running out

From 1943, the Germans prioritised the production of more powerful tanks rather than increasing numbers, and in the final year of the war, only a few were made.

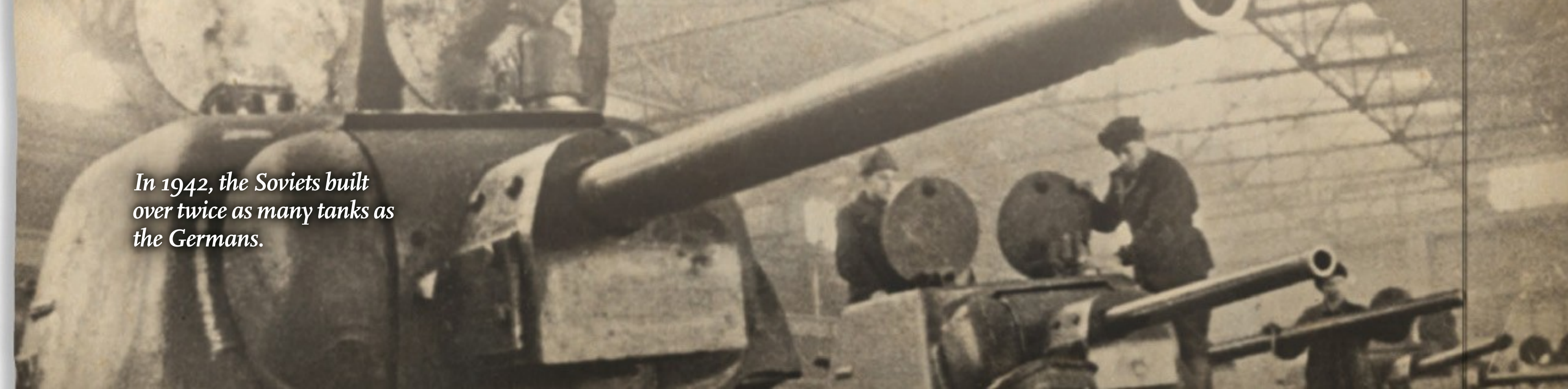
Germans used heavy armour

Germany produced more steel throughout the war than the Soviet Union. Tonnes of thick steel plates were used for reinforcing Panzer III tanks.

The front of the Panzer III had 30-mm-thick steel plates.

End of the war

The German figures only go up to the end of the war, in the spring. The Soviet figures are for the whole year.



In 1942, the Soviets built over twice as many tanks as the Germans.

Temperatures fell to minus 40 degrees in the bombed-out city during the first winter of Leningrad's siege.

1941

8TH SEPTEMBER

900 DAYS OF HORROR

GERMAN RING OF STEEL CHOKES LENINGRAD

In the autumn of 1941, the German ring of steel closes around Leningrad, trapping the residents inside the city. Hitler forbids his generals from taking Leningrad – instead, its 3.5 million citizens must starve to death, thereby allowing German settlers to move into the empty metropolis. A merciless battle against cold and hunger begins.

THE STAGE IS SET

Leningrad
Soviet Union

In 1939, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union sign a non-aggression pact, but Hitler breaks the treaty two years later, ordering his mighty army to march across the Soviet border. With Operation Barbarossa, he plans to wipe out the country's population, leaving a vast fertile land to be repopulated by German settlers.

The young journalist and author Pavel Luknitsky glanced out of the window and shaded his eyes against the bright sunlight. Summer finally seemed to have arrived in Leningrad. Luknitsky returned to his desk in Tolstoy's old villa, which was now used as a writers' retreat.

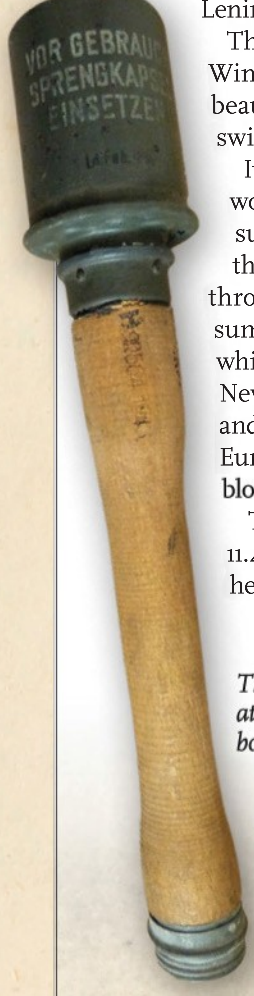
The arrival of the sunshine was timely, because Luknitsky had just delivered his new novel, *Nisso,* to his publisher, and was wondering how to spend his free time. Although his novel was about love, Luknitsky's work tended to revolve around Russia's magnificent natural world, so he was tempted to travel to the Karelian Isthmus, north-west of Leningrad, with the Writers Union.

The area was now under Soviet rule, following the Winter War against Finland in 1939–1940, and the beautiful region offered ample opportunity for swimming and hiking.

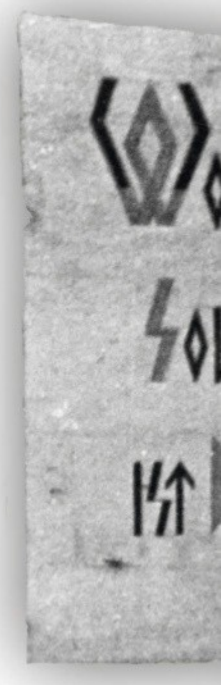
It was 21st June 1941, and although Luknitsky was worried about the war's progress in Europe, he was sure that the Germans would leave Leningrad and the rest of the Soviet empire alone. He strolled through the beautiful city streets filled with summertime youth – young men in suits, girls in white dresses. The cafes along the city's main street, Nevsky Prospekt, were packed with smiling faces, and in the evening people danced the foxtrot at Hotel Europa. The smell of lilac filled the air and love was blooming. All seemed calm.

The illusion was shattered the next morning. At 11.45, Luknitsky was listening to the radio when he heard Foreign Minister Molotov's voice: "Men and women, citizens of the Soviet Union, the Soviet Government and its head, Comrade Stalin, have instructed me to make the following announcement: at 04.00, without declaration of war and without any claims being made on the Soviet Union, German troops attacked our country, attacked our frontier in many places, and bombed from the air Zhitomir, Kiev, Sevastopol, Kaunas and other cities."

Luknitsky was horrified, but refused to be scared. While rumours circulated and tens of thousands of women and children gathered, ready to be evacuated from the city, he still went as planned to Karelia for a summer break.



These hand grenades – with explosives in a tin at the top – were used by German soldiers in both World War I and World War II.



CITIZENS FLED IN PANIC

Twenty days later, Luknitsky returned to a city in chaos. At Leningrad's railway stations, hordes of people were trying to board trains, while the city's streets and parks had been dug up and transformed into anti-tank trenches and shelters. About 80 of Luknitsky's fellow writers had joined the volunteer forces – others were trying to leave.

"Like rats leaving a sinking ship," Luknitsky noted with annoyance in his diary.

On 25th August, he made his way to the apartment of the poet Anna Akhmatova. She was known as 'the muse of tears', and was very feminine and sensitive, and highly respected as a poet. Akhmatova lay ill in bed, but she told Luknitsky she had been asked to talk on the radio.

A few days later, as nervousness in the city grew further, Luknitsky heard Akhmatova try to instil courage in the people of Leningrad by reminding them of the city's proud heritage:

"My dear fellow citizens, mothers, wives and sisters of Leningrad. For months, the Germans have sought to take

"It will be hard – but we will hold out"

Communist Party's rallying cry in the city's newspaper, *Leningradskaya Pravda.*

prisoner the city of Peter, the city of Lenin, the city of Pushkin, of Dostoyevsky and Blok, the city of great culture and great achievement."

Leningrad (now known as St Petersburg) not only had great political and symbolic significance as the country's second-largest city, but as a centre of Soviet industry, it also had enormous strategic importance. It housed 520 factories with 780,000 workers, producing the majority of the turbines used in Soviet aircraft and ships, as well as large quantities of clothing and shoes, and a wide range of precision-engineered products that weren't only important in peacetime, but also essential in war. There was no doubt: the Germans were on their way to Leningrad, and panic erupted throughout the city. Rumours circulated of how the Germans had already destroyed London with a rain of bombs.

1902-1973

NAME **PAVEL LUKNITSKY**

TITLE **AUTHOR**

Eyewitness described horrors of the city

Pavel Luknitsky stayed in the besieged city, where 3,000 people died every day from hunger and cold. In January 1942, he became a war correspondent in the Red Army's 54th Army, and managed to escape the city. In April 1944, he was present when Soviet troops liberated Leningrad.

- **Journalist at the Tass news agency.**
- **War correspondent in the Red Army.**

FIRST SHELLS HIT THE CITY

It was cloudy and foggy on 4th September, and all evening Luknitsky could hear the roar of artillery to the south. The noise seemed to be drawing closer, and shortly after midnight, the first long-range German shells struck the city. They hit the Vitebsk freight terminal and a number of factories on the outskirts of the city.

News of the bombing spread like wildfire. Luknitsky heard that the Germans had swept the Soviet divisions aside and broken through the city's outer defences. The small town of Mga had apparently been lost – a serious blow, because its station was a hub for all trains out of Leningrad. There were around three million people left in the city, but only enough shelter for a third of them. A few days after the first bombardment, Luknitsky went to visit a female acquaintance. The evening was beautiful and clear, but suddenly alarms sounded in the streets, and shortly after, bombs fell on the railway station, a few hundred metres from Luknitsky. Thousands of terrified people poured on to the streets, while numerous fires sent long plumes of smoke over the city.

Slowly it dawned on Luknitsky and his fellow citizens that Leningrad was under siege and on the brink of annihilation.

In the city newspaper, *Leningradskaya Pravda*, Luknitsky read the Communist Party's rallying cry: "We will be cold – but we will survive; we will be hungry – but we will tighten our belts; it will be hard – but we will hold out; we will hold out – until we win."

Meanwhile, German bombers roared over the city. The first major wave of attack arrived on 8th September at 19.00, when 27 aircraft dropped 6,300 incendiary bombs. At midnight, another wave of planes dropped even more explosives.

After the air raid, Anna Akhmatova's voice disappeared from the radio. Luknitsky visited her in September and found her sick and weak. She told him how her nerves were frayed by the "dragon's shriek" of the falling bombs, and how she'd had to take refuge in a basement, whose walls trembled under the blasts of the bombs. A few days after their meeting, Akhmatova was evacuated from the city in one of the last aircraft to leave. Luknitsky felt even more alone.

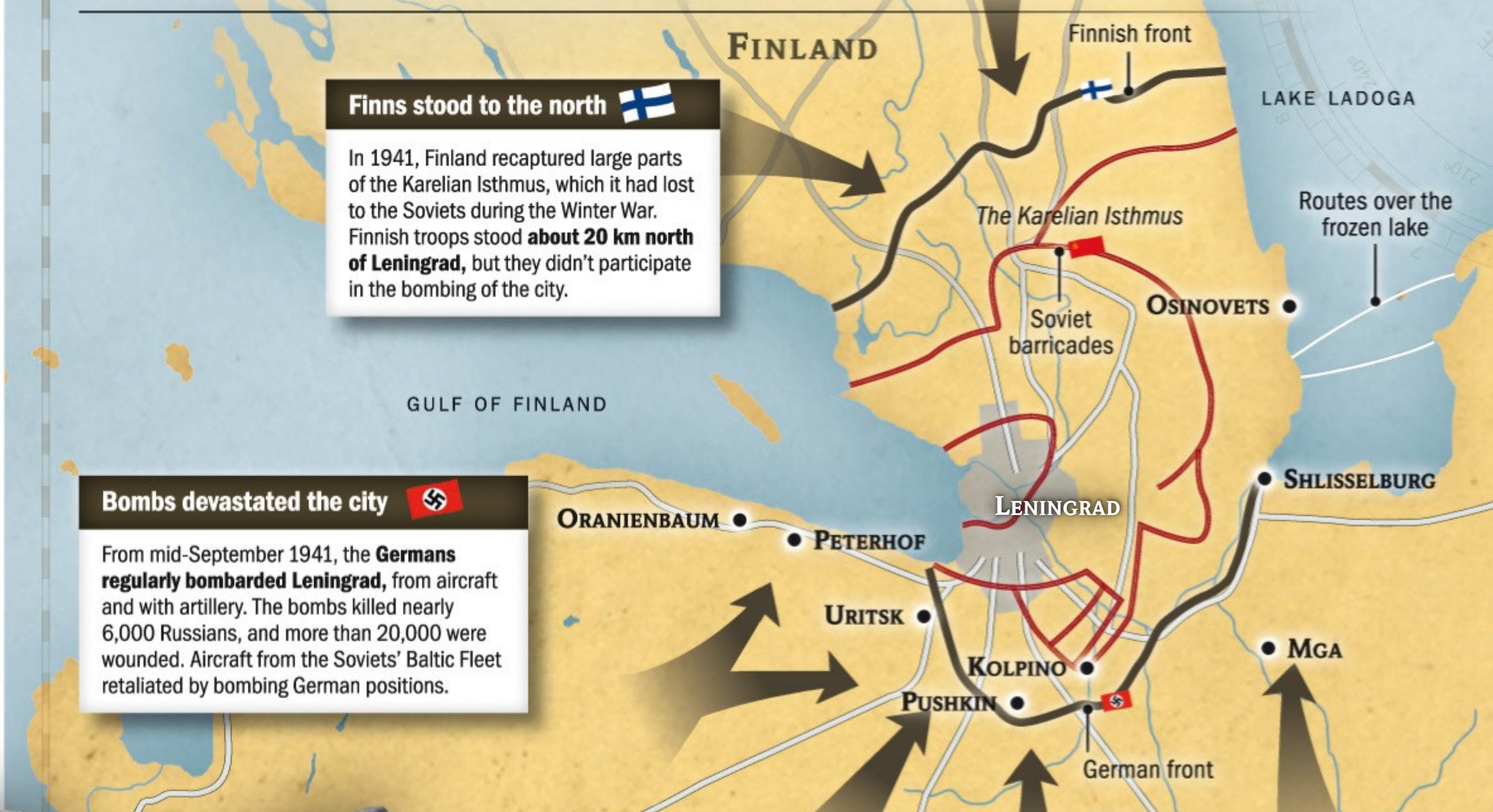
Autumn arrived and the Germans continued their

DER DEUTSCHE
LDAT STEHT
DEUTSCHLAND

The German sentry and the sign outside Leningrad signified that Germany now extended all the way to the front line.

Offensive halted outside the city

Hitler stopped the German offensive a few kilometres from Leningrad. Capturing the city quickly would mean that Germany would have to provide for millions of Soviets, and Hitler didn't want that. He therefore planned a different fate for the 3.5 million residents.


FINLAND
Finnish front
LAKE LADOGA
The Karelian Isthmus
Routes over the frozen lake
Soviet barricades
OSINOVETS
GULF OF FINLAND
SHLISSELBURG
LENINGRAD
ORANIENBAUM
PETERHOF
URITSK
KOLPINO
MGA
PUSHKIN
German front
TOSNO
RUSSIA

Finns stood to the north

In 1941, Finland recaptured large parts of the Karelian Isthmus, which it had lost to the Soviets during the Winter War. Finnish troops stood **about 20 km north of Leningrad,** but they didn't participate in the bombing of the city.

Bombs devastated the city

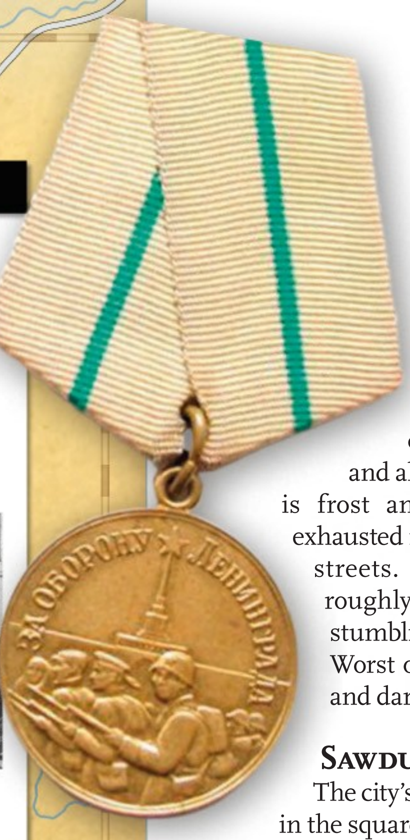
From mid-September 1941, the **Germans regularly bombarded Leningrad,** from aircraft and with artillery. The bombs killed nearly 6,000 Russians, and more than 20,000 were wounded. Aircraft from the Soviets' Baltic Fleet retaliated by bombing German positions.

Hitler choked city

All city's residents to die of hunger

The Germans quickly reached the outskirts of Leningrad, where Hitler halted the offensive. He wanted to besiege the city so the residents would starve to death. The empty city could then be populated by German settlers.

The invasion of the Soviet Union cost the Luftwaffe around 60 percent of its aircraft.



1,496,000 Soviets were honoured after the war for helping to defend Leningrad.

daily bombardment of the city. On 14th October, the first snow fell, sending the temperature well below freezing.

In his diary, Luknitsky noted: "A dark night. In this room, as in all the others in this house on Shchors Street and almost all the houses in Leningrad, there is frost and unbroken darkness. People with exhausted faces walk slowly – dark shadows on the streets. And more and more coffins, roughly made, are pulled on sleds, by the stumbling, slipping, weak relatives of the dead. Worst of all – the darkness… hunger and cold and darkness…."

Sawdust replaced flour in bread

The city's food stores only lasted a month. Traders in the square started selling cow and horse hides, so people could make soup. But eventually, even the supply of hides dried up, and people were rationed to just one slice of bread a day.

The desperate hunt for food forced residents to gather potatoes and vegetables from the surrounding fields while being shot at by the Germans. Several shiploads of mouldy grain were salvaged from the bottom of the harbour, where the Germans had sunk cargo ships laden with food.

After a few weeks, all the food had gone. The flour in bread was replaced with sawdust. Residents began boiling shoes, belts and other leather to make soup. If they mixed the soup with glue, they could make brawn. Dipped in mustard and vinegar, it became the main meal for thousands of the city's residents.

The temperature fell to minus 40 degrees. Power plants were closed. People collapsed from exhaustion while queuing for the shops. When Luknitsky visited his family in December, he found his aunt dead. Her body lay on a table in her room and the door was kept shut. No one was available to take her to one of the mass graves established by the authorities.

People were also dying in the city's Writers Union, of which Luknitsky was a member. At the end of December, six members died – one in the society's dining room. The dead man lay there for six days before anyone removed the body.

Winter was at its worst; snow and ice piled up in the streets. Patrols of Young Communists searched apartments, looking for children whose parents had died.

At the end of January, Luknitsky dragged himself, weak and hungry, through snowdrifts from his old apartment, which had been bombed in the autumn. He pulled a small sledge laden with papers and manuscripts that he wanted to save, thinking the same thing as everyone else:

"Will the Germans soon be driven off? Will the blockade soon be lifted?"

On Borovaja Street, he passed a toboggan loaded with corpses, chillingly thin and blue, almost skeletons. And as Luknitsky reached Marat Street, a thin man lay stretched out on the pavement. Dead. Just then, two women emerged from an apartment and saw the man. "My

»

City became a fortress

190 km of barricades built in record time

In the early summer of 1941, one million of Leningrad's citizens were mobilised to fortify the city. Using wood, barbed wire, soil and concrete, they built 190 km of fortified walls and anti-tank trenches to protect the city from attacks from the north and south.

Leningrad's inhabitants blocked the city's streets with barricades of wood, rubble and stone.

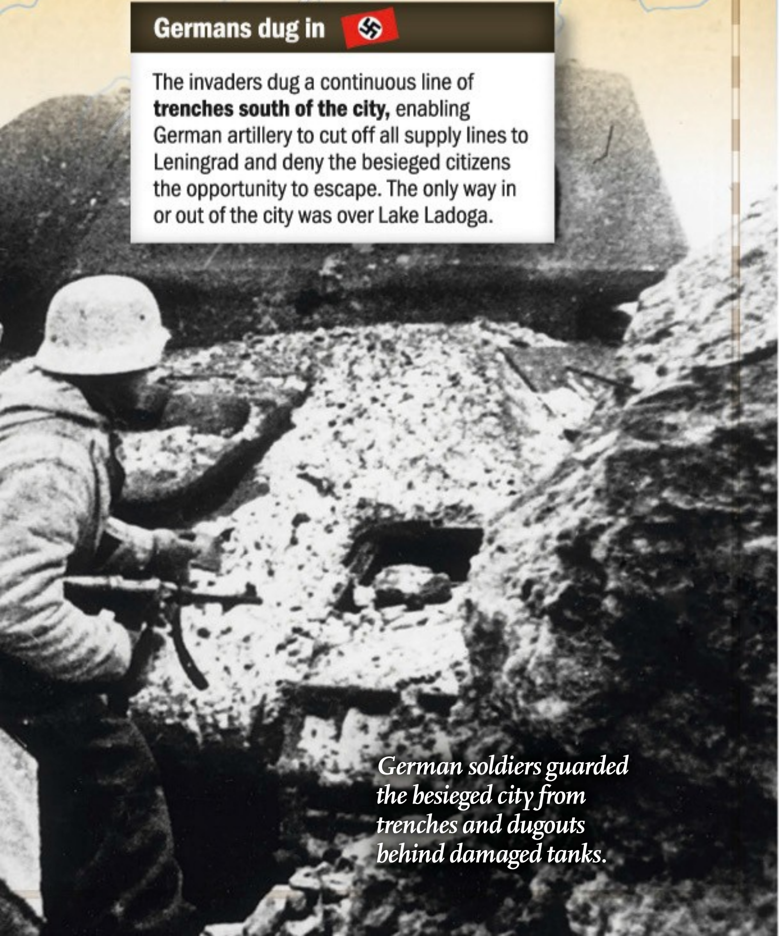
TIKHVIN
KIRISHI
0
10
20
30
40
50 km

Lake Ladoga stayed open

The Germans reached the **southern shore of Lake Ladoga,** but most of the lake remained outside German control. In winter, routes over the ice took refugees out of the city and carried food and fuel to the besieged.

Germans dug in

The invaders dug a continuous line of **trenches south of the city,** enabling German artillery to cut off all supply lines to Leningrad and deny the besieged citizens the opportunity to escape. The only way in or out of the city was over Lake Ladoga.



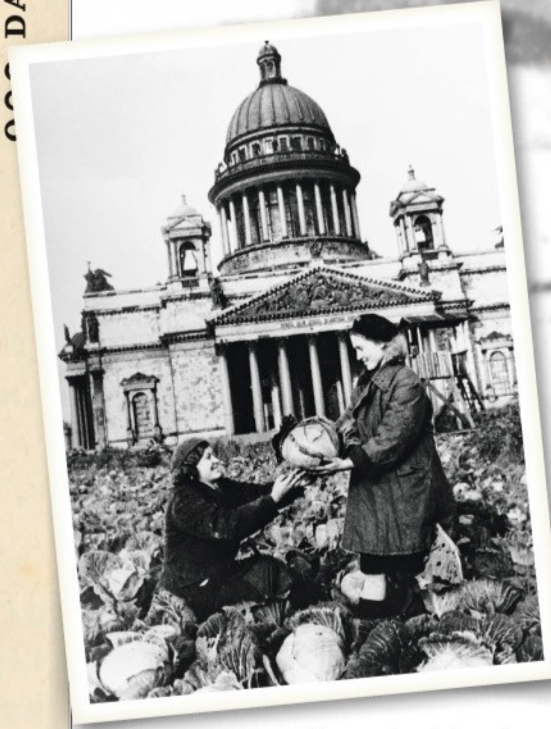
German soldiers guarded the besieged city from trenches and dugouts behind damaged tanks.

Lena. Lena!" they cried. A passer-by muttered: "Leonid Abramovich is dead and lying on the pavement."

Further on, Luknitsky met a ragged man carrying his scrawny dog, their eyes full of despair. Luknitsky wondered which would die first. He estimated that about 3,000 people were dying from starvation every day in the once proud city.

It wasn't just small things that became part of the Leningraders' diet during the siege. Every animal, from cows to cats and frogs, was killed. Wallpaper paste and fat from varnish, Vaseline, glycerine and waste products – it was all eaten. Even clothes were cut into pieces, cooked and consumed. Market traders also sold 'sweet soil', excavated from the basements of the Badaev warehouses, where molten sugar had escaped during the air raids. However, this unappetising food was nothing compared to the mysterious meat that was sometimes sold in side streets.

Robbers and thieves had long enjoyed a free rein, but now it seemed that a far more serious crime was plaguing the city:



In the summer of 1942, the city's parks were used for farming. The lawn in front of St Isaac's Cathedral was thick with cabbages.

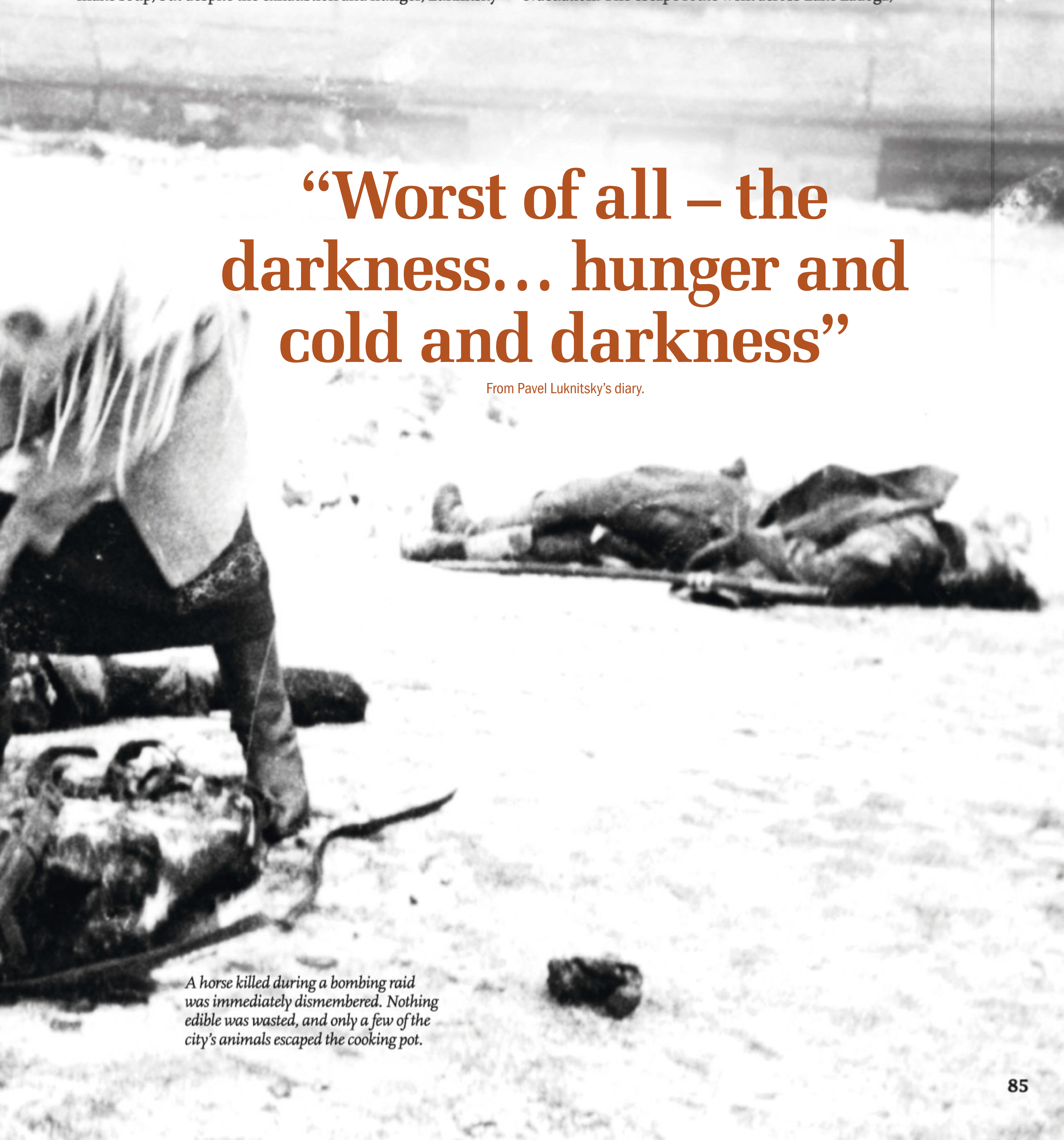
gangs were selling human flesh to desperate residents. In some neighbourhoods, children had been disappearing, and parents began to keep them off the streets, where no one was safe. Luknitsky watched his city fall apart. Leningrad's streets no longer smelt of petrol, tobacco or soap; instead, the stench of turpentine hung in the air, emanating from the disinfected trucks that drove bodies to the mass graves.

At home, his father had used his faithful dog Mishka to make soup, but despite the exhaustion and hunger, Luknitsky was still luckier than most of the city's residents. He'd become a writer for the national news agency, Tass, and was regularly sent to the front on the outskirts of the city, where he could benefit from field rations. He repeatedly begged permission to buy extra rations to take home to his desperate comrades.

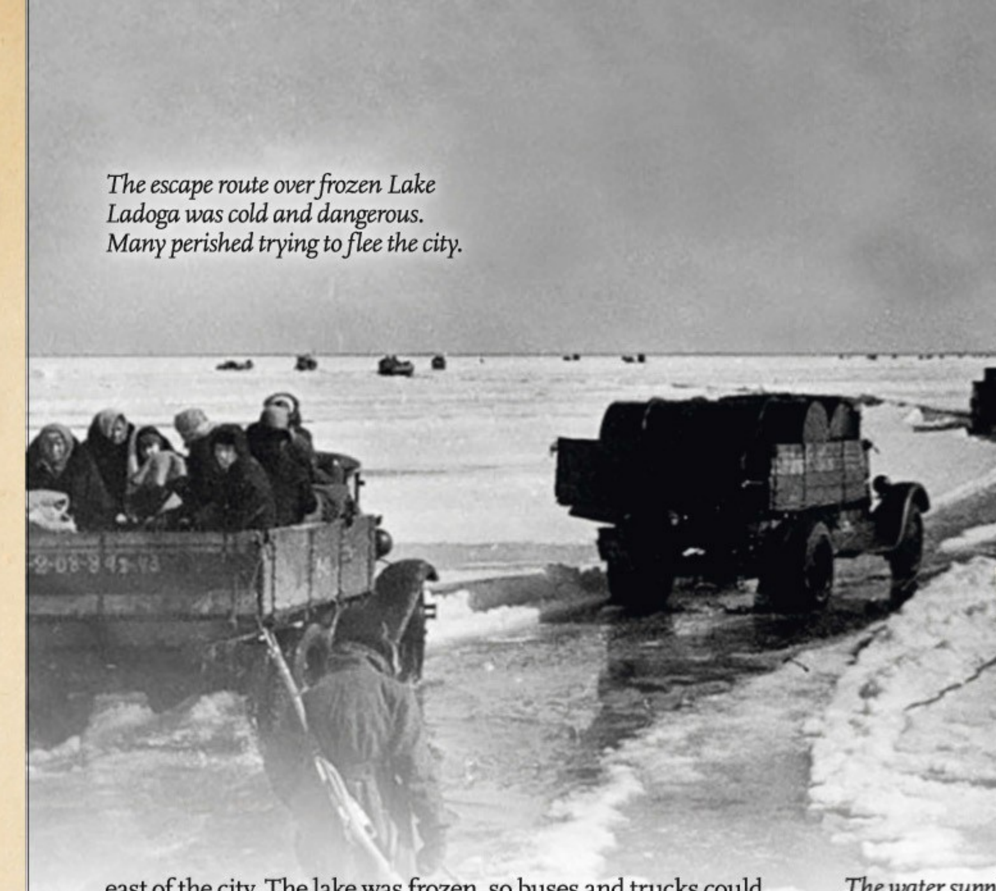
BUSES AND TRUCKS DROVE OVER ICE

On 20th January, Luknitsky heard plans for a mass evacuation. The escape route went across Lake Ladoga,

> “Worst of all – the darkness… hunger and cold and darkness”
>
> From Pavel Luknitsky's diary.



A horse killed during a bombing raid was immediately dismembered. Nothing edible was wasted, and only a few of the city's animals escaped the cooking pot.



The escape route over frozen Lake Ladoga was cold and dangerous. Many perished trying to flee the city.

east of the city. The lake was frozen, so buses and trucks could reach Soviet-controlled areas further east under cover of darkness. The trail over the ice was called the Road of Life. With great difficulty, Luknitsky managed to get 12 writers on the first transport, due to depart two days later.

The rescue operation almost killed him. The evening before departure, he had to walk 12 kilometres to pack 20 kilograms of luggage for a female colleague who had fallen ill. He'd only managed to get two and a half hours of sleep before he pulled her and her luggage on a toboggan to the evacuation site. After many hours of waiting, the bus finally left. By that point, several of the passengers could barely move. Luknitsky let out a sigh of relief as he watched the bus disappear.

The day after the rescue operation, he developed a high fever. A friend had to drag him to the city's military airport; Luknitsky was almost lifeless by the time they got there. He got a bed, a big glass of vodka and a meal. After three days, Luknitsky was back on his feet. His comrades had arranged for him to join the 54th Army as a war correspondent.

Here they hoped he would be able to get more to eat and regain his strength. He accepted the offer, and in late January, he was told to help with the evacuation of civilians across Lake Ladoga. Luknitsky climbed aboard the truck to find 14 frozen people sitting there, more dead than alive.

The truck drove through Leningrad's snowy streets, across the Okhta Bridge, and on to the lake. They passed burned-out

The water supply was cut off, so the people of Leningrad had to fetch water from beneath the ice, or melt snow and ice.

Children's toboggans were used to take the dead away. Bodies were often left for days because no one was available to move them.

> "People with exhausted faces walk slowly – dark shadows on the streets"

From Pavel Luknitsky's diary.

cars and trucks filled with refugees huddled together, their faces speckled with frost. Only the faint hope of crossing the lake kept them alive. The road between the ruined houses was narrow, but that evening they finally reached the shore, which was defended by anti-aircraft guns built into blocks of ice.

The driver turned off the truck's headlights, and for the next few hours, they rumbled over the ice at full speed, snow stretching endlessly before them. The risk of being shelled by the Germans was high. Three hours later, they reached Zhikharevo and felt a little safer. Luknitsky expected to find warmth, food and rest in the city, but it was in chaos.

Thousands of hungry people wandered about aimlessly through ramshackle camps. There was no water, no beds, no doctors. Nothing. Luknitsky was able to provide some food for the refugees on the truck, but during the night a three-year-old girl died, followed by an engineer a few hours later. The next morning, the small group left by train for the east, and Luknitsky could continue his journey to the 54th Army.

Parks became kitchen gardens

After a few months with the army, Luknitsky returned to Leningrad having regained his strength. Spring was on its way and the food situation in the besieged city had improved slightly. Over winter, trucks had transported food across Lake Ladoga and parks had been transformed into cabbage fields, while potato plants sprouted between anti-aircraft batteries.

That summer and autumn, the city's residents got some much-needed respite and hope began to spread, but a second cold winter of besiegement arrived all too soon. The German forces were weakening, however, and in December, the Soviet Army decided to embark upon Operation Iskra to end the siege. On 12th January 1943, more than 4,500 Soviet guns opened fire on the Germans, and shortly after, thousands of Soviet soldiers stormed the German lines.

In the days that followed, the Germans retreated, and after a fresh burst of fighting on 19th January, the Red Army was able to punch a small hole in the Germans' ring of steel. It was still only a narrow gap, but Leningrad celebrated the victory with red flags and dancing in the streets. A few days later, Luknitsky witnessed the arrival of the first train in many months. It had braved German artillery fire to reach Leningrad over makeshift bridges.

The train was proof that the city was heading towards better times. It was welcomed by solemn hurrahs, and the mayor gave a speech. The narrow passage to Soviet-controlled territory became known as the Corridor of Death, because of its dangers, but nonetheless, supplies got through and rations were shared.

During spring, tinned butter, preserved meat and powdered milk from the US arrived, and although supplies were insufficient and people continued to die, most of the population began to regain their strength. Leningrad was surviving. It took another winter, however, before the city was finally liberated.

Death toll kept secret

Soviet leaders didn't dare disclose the number of deaths for fear of weakening morale, but accurate figures were difficult to determine in any case.

As the Germans invaded the Soviet Union, they pushed a stream of refugees eastward. Hundreds of thousands of unregistered refugees stayed in Leningrad. This is one reason why the authorities found it difficult to determine the number of deaths.

THE OFFICIAL FIGURES After the war, the Soviet authorities set the casualty toll for those killed during the siege at

670,000

THE TRUE CASUALTIES Historians agree that the official death toll is too low – they estimate the true figure to be

between **700,000** and

1,500,000 deaths in total.

The uncertainty is due in part to the number of records that were destroyed in the war and because many of the refugees weren't officially recorded. Most historians today estimate the figure to be

between **1,100,000** and

1,300,000 civilian victims.

HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS FLED Some residents, especially women and children, were evacuated in 1942. A total of

1,400,000 escaped.

Leningrad's nightmare ended on 27th January 1944, when the Red Army finally liberated the city.

THE BLITZKRIEG FREEZES

Hitler's troops launch their assault on Moscow. Everything points towards a magnificent victory as the Kremlin's spires appear in the advance force's sights. But the icy winter has set in, and as the temperature plunges, Stalin deploys his reserves into the battle on the Eastern Front.

1941

2ND OCTOBER

The Russian winter proved a tough ordeal for both German soldiers and their equipment.

THE STAGE IS SET

Eastern Front 1941

Moscow
Soviet Union
Berlin
Germany

Since June, Germany's Panzer divisions have raced towards the Russian steppes. Vast areas have been taken and millions of Soviet soldiers captured. Drunk on success, Hitler imagines that the final victory is near. Next, he plans the ultimate humiliation of the Soviet Union: the capture of Moscow.

The night of 2nd October 1941 was calm on the ridge over the Desna River. Artillery Lieutenant Georg Richter's position gave him a vantage point overlooking no-man's land down to the river and across to the Red Army positions on the opposite bank. The day before, he'd counted eight enemy bunkers.

"I believe the attack will start the next day; in my opinion it will be the last big operation this year," he wrote in his diary.

Richter was correct on both counts. At 04.40 the next morning, no fewer than 20 batteries shattered the silence, raining shells down over the Soviet positions. The bombardment was swiftly followed by a familiar whining sound, indicating the arrival of a swarm of Stuka dive bombers. The planes dropped in a steep vertical dive before unloading their bombs on their targets at the last possible minute. Meanwhile, rocket launchers left trails of white smoke behind their deadly payloads. Before long, a new sound was added to the noisy inferno: the engine roar of hundreds of German tanks and trucks carrying infantry, all heading towards the Soviet positions.

"It ought to be all over before winter," Richter added that night. The officer had no doubts he was witnessing the start of the final act that would lead to the death of the Soviet Union.

> **"It ought to be all over before winter"**
>
> Artillery Lieutenant Georg Richter in his diary

Destination Moscow

Hitler's campaign against Communism was just three months old, marked by an impressive list of victories that had seen panzer troops swoop at lightning speed to occupy the major cities of Bialystok, Minsk and Smolensk en route to the Soviet capital. Leningrad had been cut off from the outside by Army Group North, and in Kiev, Army Group South had captured over 600,000 Soviet soldiers in history's largest *kesselschlacht* (encirclement). One more shock would be enough to collapse the Red Army, the German High Command decreed, and Moscow was the obvious target for that final offensive.

Stalin's state apparatus had long been preparing for such an attack. Since mid-July, 200,000 citizens – many of them women – had been conscripted to dig trenches, construct anti-tank traps and build hundreds of bunkers in a line one hundred kilometres west of Moscow. The fortified belt stretched 170 km from north to south and constituted a line to fall back to if the Germans advanced that far. But the work was far from complete when the German offensive against Moscow, codenamed Operation Typhoon, began. Only half the Red Army forces on the front ahead of Moscow managed to reach the line at all – many had been caught unawares when General Guderian – dubbed *Schneller Heinz* (Fast Heinz) by his admiring troops – began his advance on 30th September.

The rest of Army Group Centre attacked two days later.

The offensive repeated the campaign's first days back in June, when Panzer divisions sliced through Stalin's border defences and rolled into the Soviet hinterland, putting German soldiers in euphoric mood.

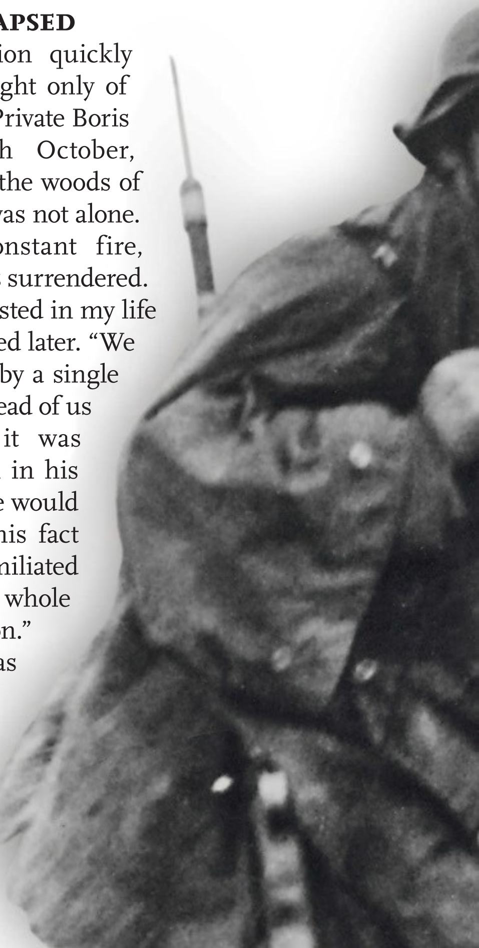
This time, Army Group Centre achieved the first of its objectives in just six days. Three Soviet armies were cut off at the industrial city of Bryansk, while another four were surrounded near the town of Vyazma to the north.

Stalin's front collapsed

All order and coordination quickly collapsed, and many thought only of escape. Among them was Private Boris Oreshkin, who on 10th October, wandered blindly through the woods of Vyazma all night, and he was not alone. After a night under constant fire, Oreshkin and his comrades surrendered.

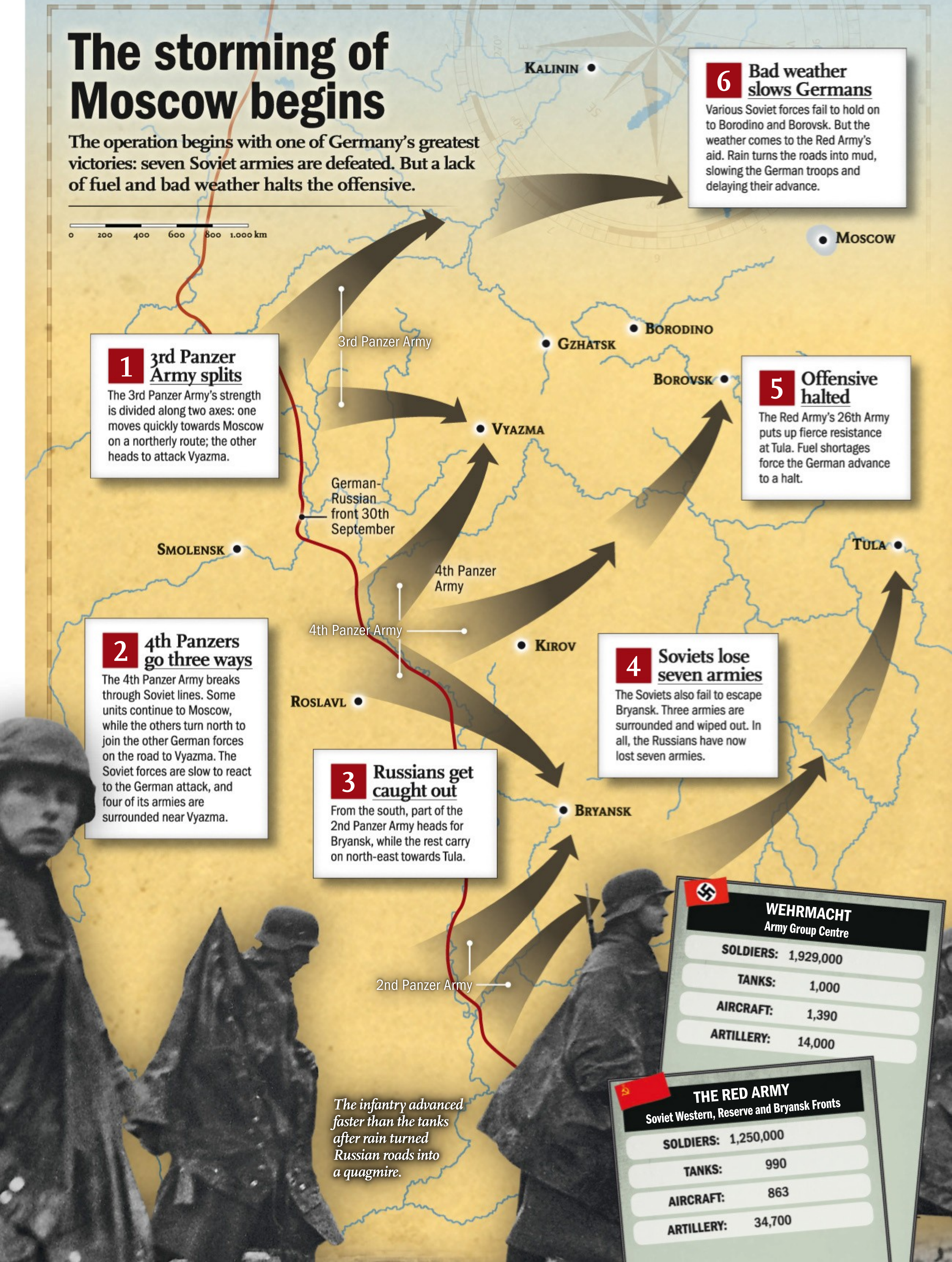
"I was never more exhausted in my life than I was there", he recalled later. "We were conveyed to a village by a single soldier. He was walking ahead of us and didn't even think it was necessary to hold the gun in his hands. He was sure that we would do nothing to him and this fact finally broke me down, humiliated me and showed me the whole hopelessness of our situation."

Despite this, Oreshkin was one of the lucky ones. He survived both the battle and captivity at the hands of the



The storming of Moscow begins

The operation begins with one of Germany's greatest victories: seven Soviet armies are defeated. But a lack of fuel and bad weather halts the offensive.


0 200 400 600 800 1.000 km
Kalinin
Moscow
3rd Panzer Army
Gzhatsk
Borodino
Borovsk
Vyazma
German-Russian front 30th September
Smolensk
4th Panzer Army
4th Panzer Army
Kirov
Tula
Roslavl
Bryansk
2nd Panzer Army

1 3rd Panzer Army splits

The 3rd Panzer Army's strength is divided along two axes: one moves quickly towards Moscow on a northerly route; the other heads to attack Vyazma.

2 4th Panzers go three ways

The 4th Panzer Army breaks through Soviet lines. Some units continue to Moscow, while the others turn north to join the other German forces on the road to Vyazma. The Soviet forces are slow to react to the German attack, and four of its armies are surrounded near Vyazma.

3 Russians get caught out

From the south, part of the 2nd Panzer Army heads for Bryansk, while the rest carry on north-east towards Tula.

4 Soviets lose seven armies

The Soviets also fail to escape Bryansk. Three armies are surrounded and wiped out. In all, the Russians have now lost seven armies.

5 Offensive halted

The Red Army's 26th Army puts up fierce resistance at Tula. Fuel shortages force the German advance to a halt.

6 Bad weather slows Germans

Various Soviet forces fail to hold on to Borodino and Borovsk. But the weather comes to the Red Army's aid. Rain turns the roads into mud, slowing the German troops and delaying their advance.

The infantry advanced faster than the tanks after rain turned Russian roads into a quagmire.

WEHRMACHT
Army Group Centre

SOLDIERS:	1,929,000
TANKS:	1,000
AIRCRAFT:	1,390
ARTILLERY:	14,000

THE RED ARMY
Soviet Western, Reserve and Bryansk Fronts

SOLDIERS:	1,250,000
TANKS:	990
AIRCRAFT:	863
ARTILLERY:	34,700

MOSCOW CAMPAIGN

GERMANS' SLOW MARCH COST THEM VICTORY

30th September The German Army Group Centre has three armoured and three infantry armies ready along a 500-kilometre line. The Red Army has 15 armies, but only half the strength because it's not yet mobilised enough soldiers.

2nd October Germany begins its offensive against Moscow. According to Hitler's plan, it will decide the entire campaign.

7th October The first melting snow falls around Bryansk. The roads turn to mud, and the German tanks get bogged down.

13th October Frost makes the roads passable once more, and German armies resume their offensive against Moscow.

27th October German Panzer Armies attack the Red Army defensive line, leading to a Soviet retreat. But bad weather, fuel shortages and damaged bridges once again delay the German advance on Moscow.

12th November The temperature around Moscow drops to minus 12° Celsius, and the Red Army sends forces on skis against German soldiers in front of the city.

15th November German assault on Moscow.

27th November Germans advance north-west of Moscow and cross the Moscow-Volga Canal. Just two days later, they are pushed back across the canal.

5th December The advance stops. Soviet General Zhukov has managed to assemble a superior army. A Soviet counterattack drives the Germans back.

16th December Hitler orders his army to dig in and wait for reinforcements from the west. The order is ignored at the front, and German soldiers flee westward.

Germans. Elsewhere, entire Soviet units were led to a bloody end rushing enemy positions.

German Private HE Braun's unit was one of those defending against wave after wave of attack from Soviet soldiers on the night of 11th October. When dawn broke, he thought the Soviets' suicidal rush was over, but he was in for a shock. "Suddenly the dead in the foreground started to move again", Braun recalled later. "A sea of Red Army soldiers" charged the German positions. Many were hit by German bullets, but others stormed through the German lines.

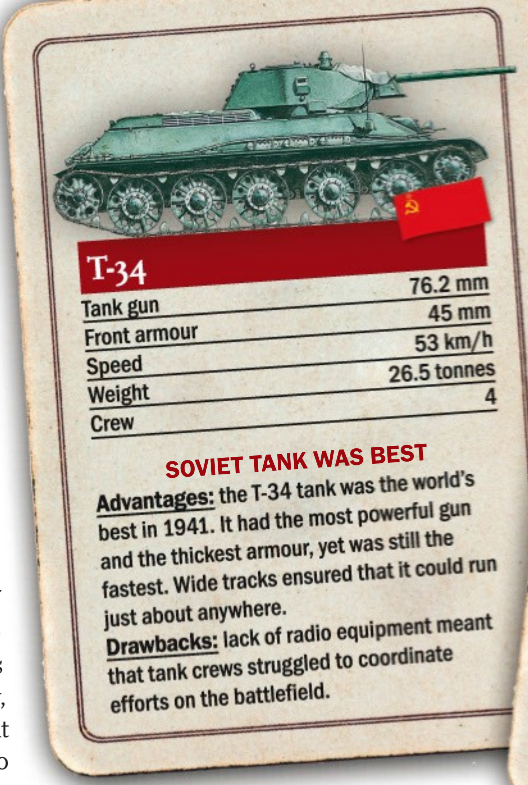
Several Germans were trampled to death, and horses ran in panic in all directions, while trucks crammed with Soviet soldiers raced past Braun's position. The Germans fought for their lives with pistols, hand grenades and even spades until a group of tanks finally came to their rescue.

Around 85,000 Soviet soldiers escaped the Vyazma encirclement, while 23,000 managed to escape Bryansk. Red Army casualties were unimaginable. The official tally totalled 658,279 dead, missing or captured, but the actual losses over the two battles was closer to one million men. Large quantities of materiel were destroyed or fell into German hands.

15-year-old Maria Denisova's village was at the centre of some of the bloodiest battles. When the action died down, she crawled up from the basement under her parents' house to witness a horrific scene: "There were so many dead bodies all

Moskau 100km
Berlin 1560km.
Brest 2910km.
Athen 2220km
Narvik 1700km.

When the German offensive stalled, the forces were close to their target – but an awfully long way from home.



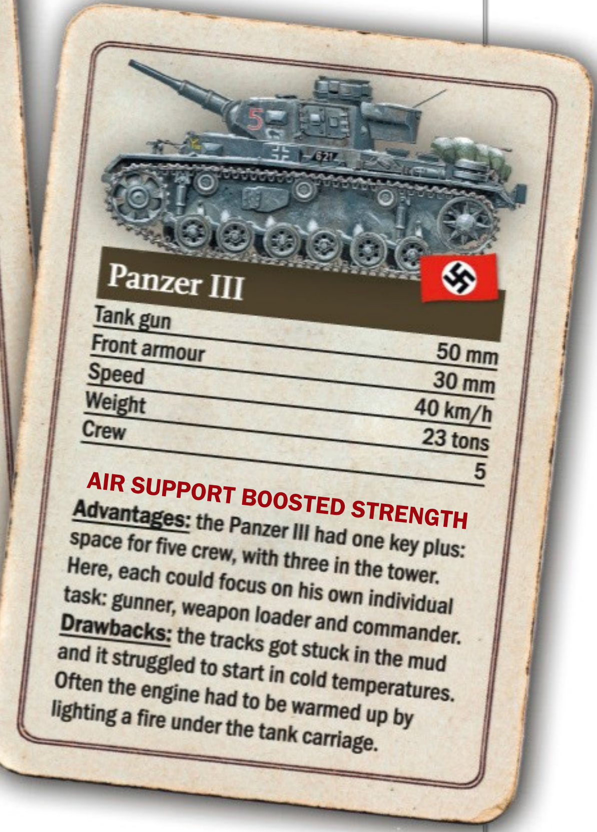
T-34

Tank gun	76.2 mm
Front armour	45 mm
Speed	53 km/h
Weight	26.5 tonnes
Crew	4

SOVIET TANK WAS BEST

Advantages: the T-34 tank was the world's best in 1941. It had the most powerful gun and the thickest armour, yet was still the fastest. Wide tracks ensured that it could run just about anywhere.

Drawbacks: lack of radio equipment meant that tank crews struggled to coordinate efforts on the battlefield.



Panzer III

Tank gun	50 mm
Front armour	30 mm
Speed	40 km/h
Weight	23 tons
Crew	5

AIR SUPPORT BOOSTED STRENGTH

Advantages: the Panzer III had one key plus: space for five crew, with three in the tower. Here, each could focus on his own individual task: gunner, weapon loader and commander.

Drawbacks: the tracks got stuck in the mud and it struggled to start in cold temperatures. Often the engine had to be warmed up by lighting a fire under the tank carriage.

over the place," she recalled. "We had to walk on them since there was no other place to step."

Denisova lost both her parents in the battle. The survivors had to drink water from the river, even though it ran red with blood.

STALIN WENT UNDERGROUND

After the disasters at Vyazma and Bryansk, the Soviet leader feared it would be impossible to prevent the German advance on Moscow. On 15th October, he ordered the destruction of 1,000 factories in the capital. At the same time, the seat of government was moved from the Kremlin to Kuibyshev, eight hundred kilometres to the east. At this point, Stalin remained unsure as to whether he should stay or flee too.

The Kremlin had no shelters, so Stalin moved to the air defence's makeshift headquarters. From here, a lift led directly down to the underlying metro station. Secure from Luftwaffe bombs, Stalin had a special compartment built in a train hidden from the rest of the station behind plywood panelling. Here, the dictator could both work and sleep. Moscow's darkest hour had arrived.

As officials and party members boarded trains to the east, Muscovites quickly realised that their leaders were abandoning them. Many assumed that Stalin had already left, at which point what had been a relatively orderly evacuation descended into chaos. Shops were looted, and Soviet citizens burned their portraits of Stalin and party membership cards en masse. Some did so out of fear of being shot by Germans as they entered the city, while others were happy at the prospect of being rid of Stalin's oppressive regime. In the streets around government buildings, partially burned papers floated through the air as officials destroyed archived documents.

OFFENSIVE GROUND TO A HALT

As panic spread in Moscow, German forces heading towards the city ran into difficulties of their own. Rain, sleet and snow made the Russian dirt roads impassable. The army was now paying the price for Hitler's spring campaign in the Balkans, which had delayed the invasion of the Soviet Union by more than a month.

"We can't go on. There is no more petrol and nothing is coming up behind us," wrote one exhausted German soldier. "The snow has melted and worsened the muck. Rations still do not arrive and we sit in filth the entire day."

> "So many dead bodies"
>
> 15-year-old Maria Denisova in an interview

In the battle against the mud, German tanks used three times more fuel than planned. The infantry, who for months had lagged far behind the tanks and other motorised vehicles now overtook them. After taking – with some effort – Stalin's defensive line 100 km from Moscow, the offensive ground to a halt. The swampy terrain and lack of supplies across the entire front made it impossible to continue. At the end of October Hitler ordered a pause until 15th November to reorganise his forces and wait for the autumn frosts to harden the ground.

Stalin had regained his courage in the meantime – on the afternoon of 19th October, he decided to remain in Moscow.

Army units of all sizes that hadn't been caught in the traps at Vyazma and Bryansk arrived in the outskirts of Moscow, where they joined up with reserve forces who'd been brought in from the east as well as parts of the front that weren't so heavily pressed. 440,000 civilian workers were also called up and armed to take their place in defending the Soviet capital.

On the 7th November, to mark the 24th anniversary of the Communist revolution, Stalin ordered a parade to bolster the fighting spirit of both new recruits and Moscow's remaining citizens. Despite the Luftwaffe's ever-present threat, he planned to carry out the annual military parade in Red Square in front of the Kremlin. From there the troops would march directly to the front.

The cameras were in place to demonstrate to the whole nation that Stalin hadn't bolted. From 08.00, column after column marched across the cobblestone square as falling snow settled on their caps and uniforms. They were followed by flag-bearing cavalry and the Red Army's mighty T-34 tanks.

Recruit Leonid Shevelev had heard the rumours that Stalin had fled. The sight of the dictator at Lenin's mausoleum was inspirational, giving the new conscripts the passion to march "with the kind of determination as if we were nailing down the coffins of the advancing Nazis". Stalin assured the soldiers that Hitler's Germany would "collapse under the weight of its own crimes".

THE GERMAN TANKS ROLLED ON AGAIN

Eight days after the Red Army parade, Army Group Centre opened the second phase of Operation Typhoon. An attack north-west of Moscow was intended to lead to the city's encirclement before the winter snow made it impossible

Unlike the Germans, many Soviet soldiers were equipped with warm clothes and snow-white camouflage suits. The Soviets also had better access to supplies and reinforcements than the invaders.

Thick felted wool socks kept the Red Army soldiers' feet warm and dry in their boots.

to move. But it was an exhausted, starving, frozen and lice-infested army that advanced to battle.

Hitler and his generals hadn't expected the war against the Soviet Union to last for long as it had, and had failed to provide proper winter equipment. The Russian winter cold was quick to present serious problems for both personnel and equipment.

Soldiers were forced to fight in women's clothing

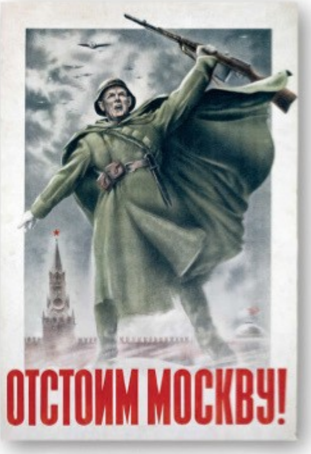
Crawling lice proved a particular nuisance. Poor levels of hygiene also spread dysentery, which could be fatal in the winter cold because the men constantly had to expose themselves because of diarrhoea. According to medical officer Heinrich Happe, "they lost more body warmth than they could afford to lose."

Haape's crude solution was to cut a hole in the seat of the soldiers' trousers, so they could easily relieve themselves.

Lack of warm winter coats and woollen underwear forced German troops to steal any clothes they could from the local civilian population. In some cases, soldiers went into battle wearing several layers of Russian women's clothing. The cold also prevented the Luftwaffe from supporting the ground forces' advance. With temperatures 20 degrees below zero, the Stuka dive bombers had trouble starting. Soviet equipment was far hardier.

"Russian aircraft totally dominate air space," complained an otherwise-confident Richter in his diary on 26th November. Freezing temperatures rendered machine guns unusable, and several units suffered more casualties from frostbite and cold than enemy bullets and grenades. It was only their firm belief that they were fighting the final battle of the campaign that kept German soldiers going.

North-west of Moscow, the Red Army was pushed back step by step. But even though the Wehrmacht retained the initiative, the advance had slowed to a snail's pace. Soviet troops fought where they stood, and when threatened by overwhelming force, had time to calmly retreat to new positions. The panic that had enveloped the Soviet army at Vyazma and Bryansk was no more.


ОТСТОИМ МОСКВУ!

"Fight for Moscow" commanded posters from the Soviet propaganda machine.

On the evening of 4th December, Army Group Centre forces were exhausted. Less than 20 km from the outskirts of Moscow, the advanced units could clearly see Moscow's domes and spires in the clear frosty air, but Operation Typhoon had finally stalled – literally stuck in the snow and out of fuel.

Meanwhile, the Red Army was preparing its response. General Georgy Zhukov was now commanding the army's Moscow Front and had spent weeks building up huge reserves. Despite mammoth losses, the Red

Army's troops at the front were now stronger than they'd been at the beginning of Operation Typhoon. Zhukov had over 30 percent more soldiers, twice as much artillery and two-and-a-half times as many tanks as at the beginning of the battle. In contrast, Army Group Centre was unable to replace its personnel and materiel losses.

Germans were driven back from Moscow

One of the spearheads of Zhukov's attack was Lieutenant Pavel Gudz's armoured unit. On the evening of 5th December, he stood in the snow on a riverbank 30 km north-west of the Kremlin. Behind him, a heavy tank rolled into position, its engine noise masked by the scattered fire from guns on both sides of the front.

Peering through his binoculars, Gudz scouted for the best place to target the following morning's attack. He identified an unsuspecting German tank unit, which had spent the night in the nearby village of Nefedyevo. Between remote exchanges of gunfire, Gudz could hear the sound of a harmonica.

His unit attacked at dawn. Before the Germans could respond, eight of their eighteen tanks were on fire. The survivors took cover behind the houses, but it wasn't long before the Germans took flight towards the west – sharply pursued by Gudz's tank and Soviet artillery fire. Gudz won a medal for his efforts – and he was far from an isolated example.

Everywhere along the front, General Zhukov's counterattack caught the Germans unaware. During the first ten days of the counter-offensive, several towns and cities north-west of Moscow returned to Soviet hands. To the south, Guderian's panzer divisions barely escaped being surrounded themselves. The sight of dead German soldiers in their hopelessly inadequate uniforms infused the Red Army's raw recruits with extra courage.

On the banks of the Moskva River, a group of Soviet soldiers found the body of a German who had wrapped a bra around his ears to protect them from the cold. The enemy wasn't exactly living up to its reputation of being an all-conquering elite force.

Wehrmacht fled in chaos and panic

The Soviet counter-offensive in December was devastating for the Germans. It was the first time the Wehrmacht had suffered such a decisive defeat. Many soldiers panicked and fled west. All order broke down and the forces disintegrated.

"But one misses the orderly hand of the High Command," wrote Richter drily, as his unit attempted to flee through the tangle of vehicles and discarded equipment , joining groups of soldiers – large and small – in full retreat.

Hitler's armies didn't realise it, but they would never again come as close to Moscow as they did on the evening of 4th December 1941.

Disaster loomed ahead

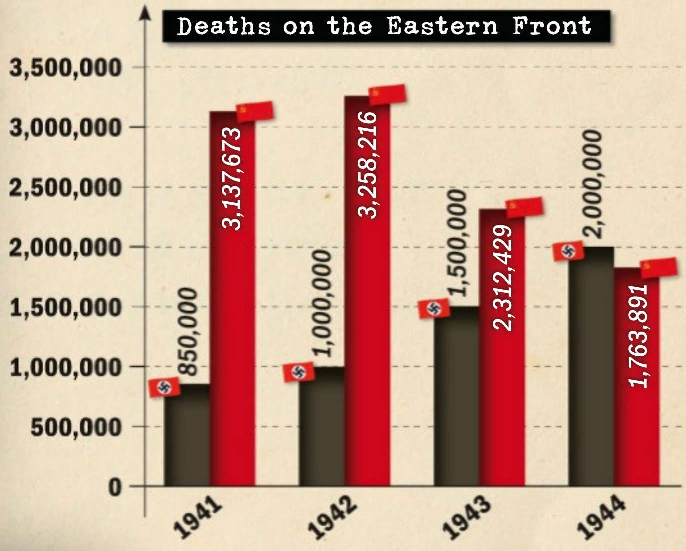
German hopes of a swift victory over the Soviet Union died after the campaign against Moscow failed. Instead, eventual defeat waited.

In the winter of 1941-42 the Red Army's counter-offensive turned the German Blitzkrieg into a drawn-out duel. It was a showdown the Wehrmacht was doomed to lose in the face of a Soviet Union with larger reserves of manpower and equipment.

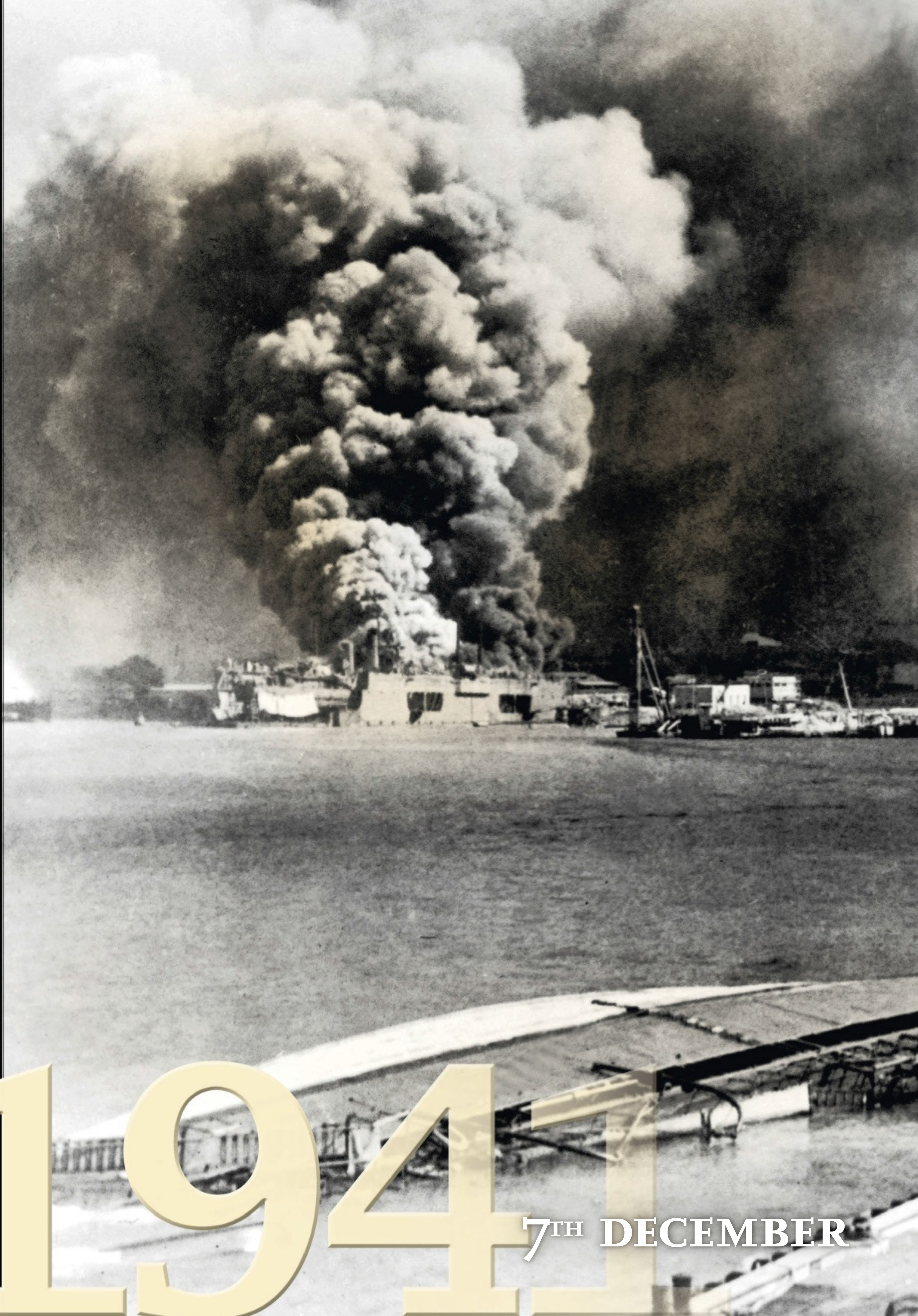
Hitler's final defeat was still some way off in the summer of 1942, when German forces attacked on the southern front. But after further success, a bloody stalemate developed again, this time at Stalingrad.

A Soviet counterattack that winter led to a German army's surrender and the war's turning point. During the summer of 1943 the Germans again tried to take the initiative, but their attack at Kursk ended in complete failure. The German forces' offensive capacity had been exhausted – the initiative was now exclusively with Stalin.

After the winter of 1941, Luftwaffe pilots received fur-lined hats.



The Germans lost troops on the Eastern Front faster than they could be replaced. Instead, the ranks had to be filled with boys.

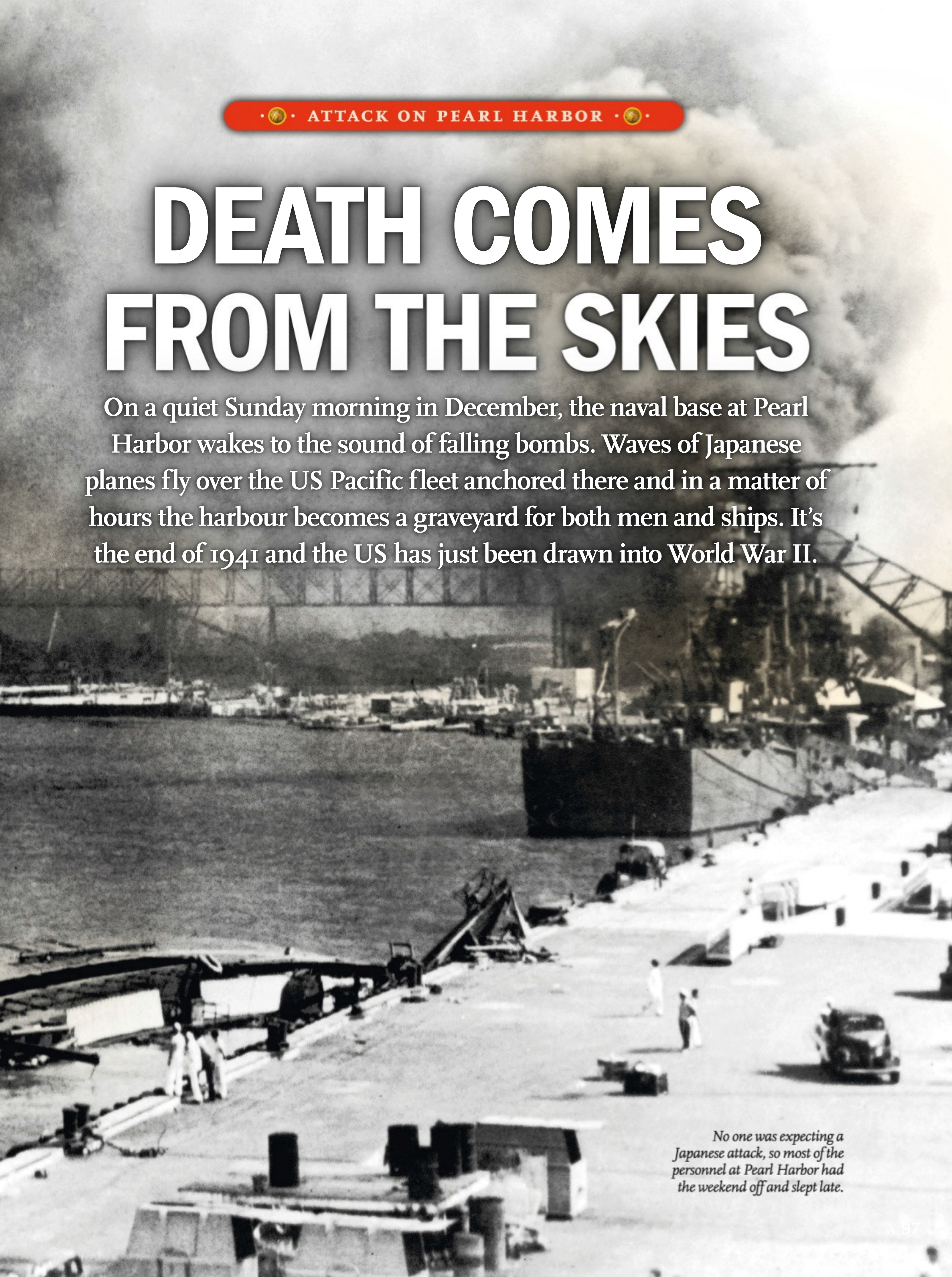


1941

7th DECEMBER

DEATH COMES FROM THE SKIES

On a quiet Sunday morning in December, the naval base at Pearl Harbor wakes to the sound of falling bombs. Waves of Japanese planes fly over the US Pacific fleet anchored there and in a matter of hours the harbour becomes a graveyard for both men and ships. It's the end of 1941 and the US has just been drawn into World War II.



No one was expecting a Japanese attack, so most of the personnel at Pearl Harbor had the weekend off and slept late.

THE STAGE IS SET

Hawaii
Pearl Harbor

WWII rages in Europe, while on the other side of the world Japan expands its territory. The US maintains its policy of neutrality, but introduces economic sanctions to slow the Japanese advance. The Japanese, believing that a confrontation with the US is unavoidable, decide to strike a decisive first blow at Pearl Harbor.

CLOUDS LAY LIKE A THICK BLANKET OVER THE PACIFIC as 183 Japanese planes approached the Hawaiian Islands on 7th December 1941. Beneath him, Commander Mitsuo Fuchida caught a glimpse of the ocean. Moments later, when his pilots broke through the clouds in their Nakajima B5N 'Kate' bombers, they could see white surf below them. It was the north coast of Oahu island.

Before long Fuchida could see Pearl Harbor. Through his binoculars, the commander assessed the sleepy naval base, counting the American battleships. All eight were in port – and not a single enemy plane was on the wing.

At 07.49 Fuchida told his radio operator, Norinobu Mizuki, to send the agreed coded signal to the other planes. The phrase "To! To! To!" crackled through the radio – an abbreviation of *totsugeki*, the Japanese word for attack!

The first target was the Wheeler Field airfield, 15 kilometres north-west of Pearl Harbor. From above, Aichi D3A 'Val' dive bombers swooped in and dropped their payloads, while low-flying Mitsubishi A6M 'Zero' fighters opened fire with machine guns setting buildings, hangars and lines of US aircraft ablaze. Wheeler Field's commander Colonel William J Flood later described how the Japanese fighters flew so low he "could even see the gold in their teeth".

For the Americans, the unthinkable was happening: the Pacific Fleet was under attack in its home base, and the United States was being forced into World War II.

The battleship Nevada tried to escape the harbour during the attack, but was bombed, forcing the captain to run the ship aground.

ROOSEVELT HAD SHUT OFF JAPAN'S OIL SUPPLY

The Japanese air raid over Oahu was the culmination of years of growing tension between the Asian superpower and the United States.

Since 1937, Japan had been at war with China, where the Americans had major economic interests. The empire's aggressive foreign policy troubled the government in Washington, while the American public was disgusted by reports of unthinkable acts of cruelty against the Chinese. In 1940, the US had fired a warning shot by moving its Pacific Fleet from the west coast of the United States to Hawaii and thus closer to Japan. But the message was ignored, and in September of that year, Japanese forces moved to occupy French Indochina. President Franklin D Roosevelt responded again, this time by blocking the sale of oil to Japan – a serious provocation when seen through Japanese eyes, 1884-1943

NAME **ISOROKU YAMAMOTO**

TITLE ADMIRAL AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE JAPANESE FLEET

Japan's naval chief feared US strength

Yamamoto knew the West well. The Japanese admiral had studied at Harvard University in the United States, been appointed as a naval attaché to Washington and had attended several naval conferences in London. Yamamoto's knowledge of the West made him reluctant to go to war with the US because he feared its superior production capabilities.

However, once war became inevitable, the admiral loyally began forming plans. He believed that the best chance of success lay in a pre-emptive and devastating strike that would break the US Pacific fleet. As a keen advocate of aircraft carriers, the Japanese commander preferred to carry out the attack by plane.

Yamamoto had an almost sacred status among the Japanese public. When the Americans managed to shoot down his plane in 1943, the authorities waited a month before publishing the news.

- **Studied at Harvard University in 1919-21.**
- **Commander of the Japanese fleet from 1939.**

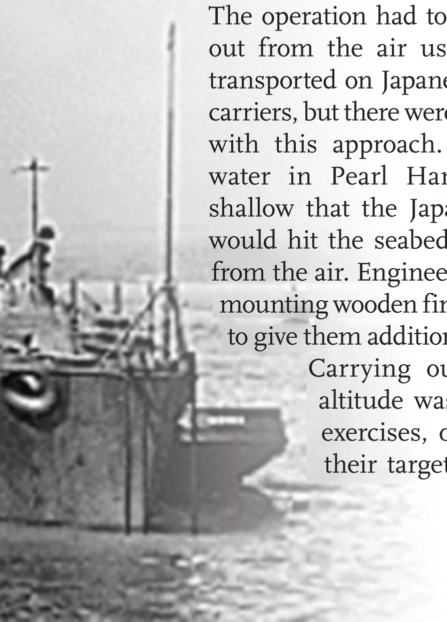
because the country's poor mineral resources left it deeply dependent on US oil.

In January 1941, almost a year before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the commander of the Imperial Japanese Navy, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, predicted the outbreak of war, writing that, "A conflict with the United States ... is inevitable." Yamamoto believed that the Japanese needed to "destroy the US main fleet at the outset of the war" in order to have any chance of success.

Yamamoto had already conceived the bold plan of action that would be used against the Hawaiian naval base and the Japanese spent 1941 thoroughly preparing for the attack.

The operation had to be carried out from the air using planes transported on Japanese aircraft carriers, but there were problems with this approach. First, the water in Pearl Harbor was so shallow that the Japanese torpedoes would hit the seabed when dropped from the air. Engineers solved this by mounting wooden fins on the torpedo to give them additional buoyancy.

Senninbari *(one-thousand stitch belts) were sewn by women to bring luck.*



Carrying out bomb attacks from high altitude was another challenge. In early exercises, only 10 percent of bombs hit their targets, but intensive training and better crew cooperation bore fruit: the proportion of accurate hits gradually rose to around 80 percent.

Meanwhile, a spy attached to the Japanese consulate in Honolulu tracked the Pacific Fleet's movements, the number of ships at the base and their daily routine. What he could not observe himself, he read in the newspaper, which reported all ship activities. The spy also discovered that activity levels at the base were at their lowest on Sunday mornings.

Attack force crept into position

In the autumn of 1941, as Japanese attack preparations entered their decisive phase, Japanese and US diplomats were still trying to find a peaceful solution.

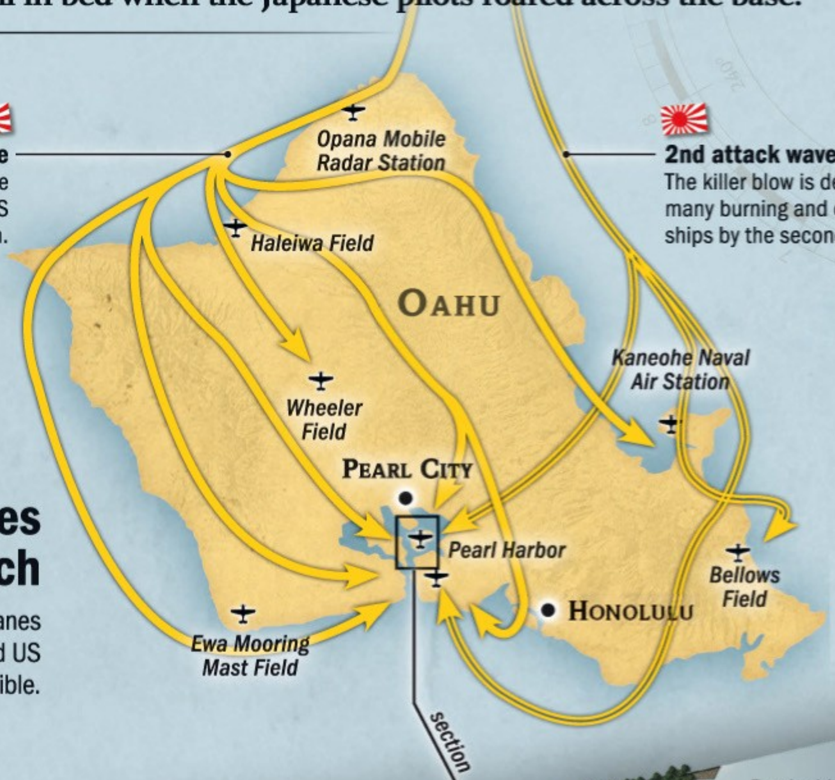
The Japanese demanded that the US cease its support of China and resume oil supplies, while the Americans demanded Japan leave China and French Indochina.

"It's an ultimatum", protested Japanese Prime Minister Hideki Tojo – and he refused to give in to US demands.

Gradually, it became clear that the time for negotiations was over, and at the end of November 1941 Japanese ships began slipping away from their naval ports in small groups to gather in the far north. From there, the assault fleet's six aircraft carriers and their escort would set out across the icy winter sea. The route was intended to minimise the risk of

The Japanese struck without warning

Admiral Yamamoto deliberately chose to attack Pearl Harbor on a Sunday morning, knowing that was the time the Americans would be least prepared. Most of them were still in bed when the Japanese pilots roared across the base.

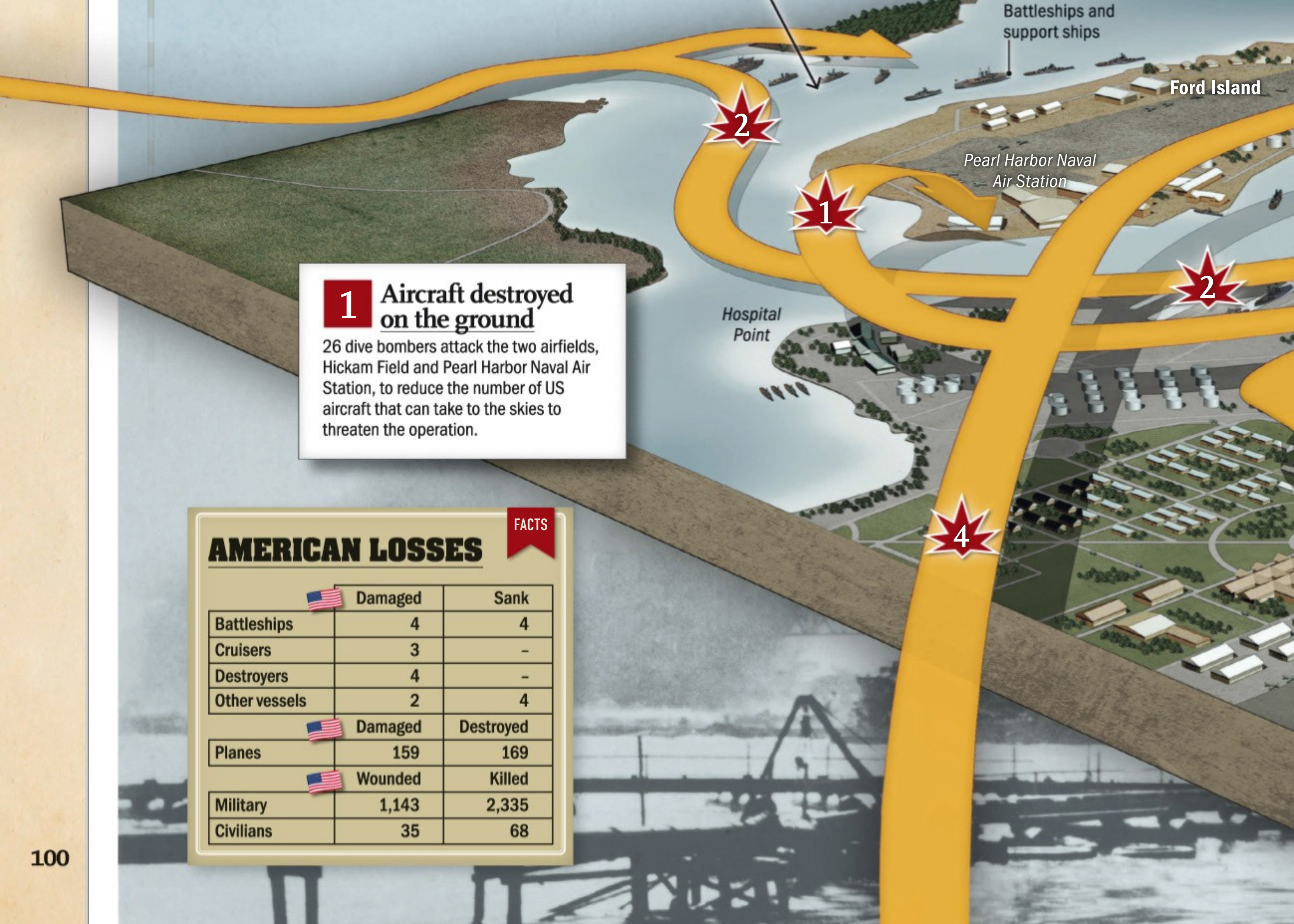

Opana Mobile Radar Station
Haleiwa Field
Oahu
Kaneohe Naval Air Station
Wheeler Field
Pearl City
Pearl Harbor
Bellows Field
Honolulu
Ewa Mooring Mast Field
section

1st attack wave
On the way to Pearl Harbor, the Japanese aircraft put US airfields out of action.

2nd attack wave
The killer blow is delivered to many burning and damaged ships by the second wave.

Japan's planes hid on approach

The aircraft carrier-based planes flew low over the water to avoid US radar for as long as possible.


Battleships and support ships
Ford Island
Pearl Harbor Naval Air Station
Hospital Point
2
1
2
4

1 Aircraft destroyed on the ground

26 dive bombers attack the two airfields, Hickam Field and Pearl Harbor Naval Air Station, to reduce the number of US aircraft that can take to the skies to threaten the operation.

FACTS

AMERICAN LOSSES

	Damaged	Sank
Battleships	4	4
Cruisers	3	–
Destroyers	4	–
Other vessels	2	4
	Damaged	Destroyed
Planes	159	169
	Wounded	Killed
Military	1,143	2,335
Civilians	35	68

1ST ATTACK WAVE 07.50-08.10

ZERO FIGHTERS	43
KATE TORPEDO BOMBERS	40
KATE BOMBERS	49
VAL DIVE BOMBERS	51

MAIN OBJECTIVES:

- Sink the Pacific fleet's eight battleships.
- Eliminate Oahu's air defences, especially the 145 aircraft at the large Wheeler Field airfield.

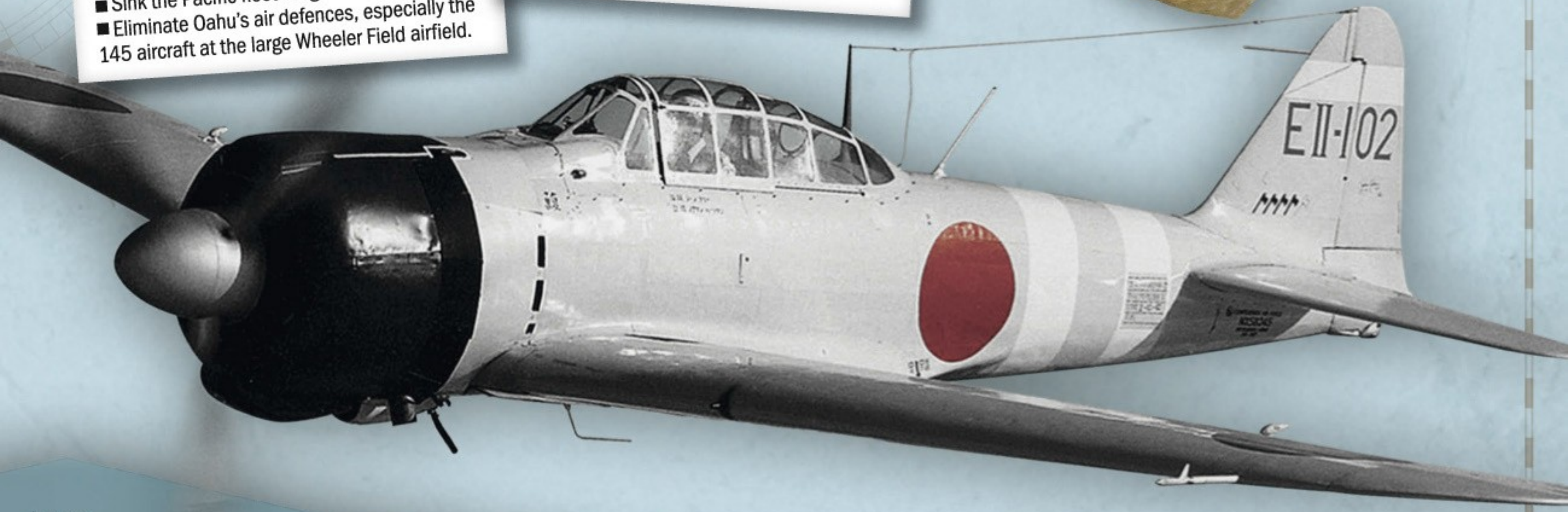
2ND ATTACK WAVE 09.05-09.45

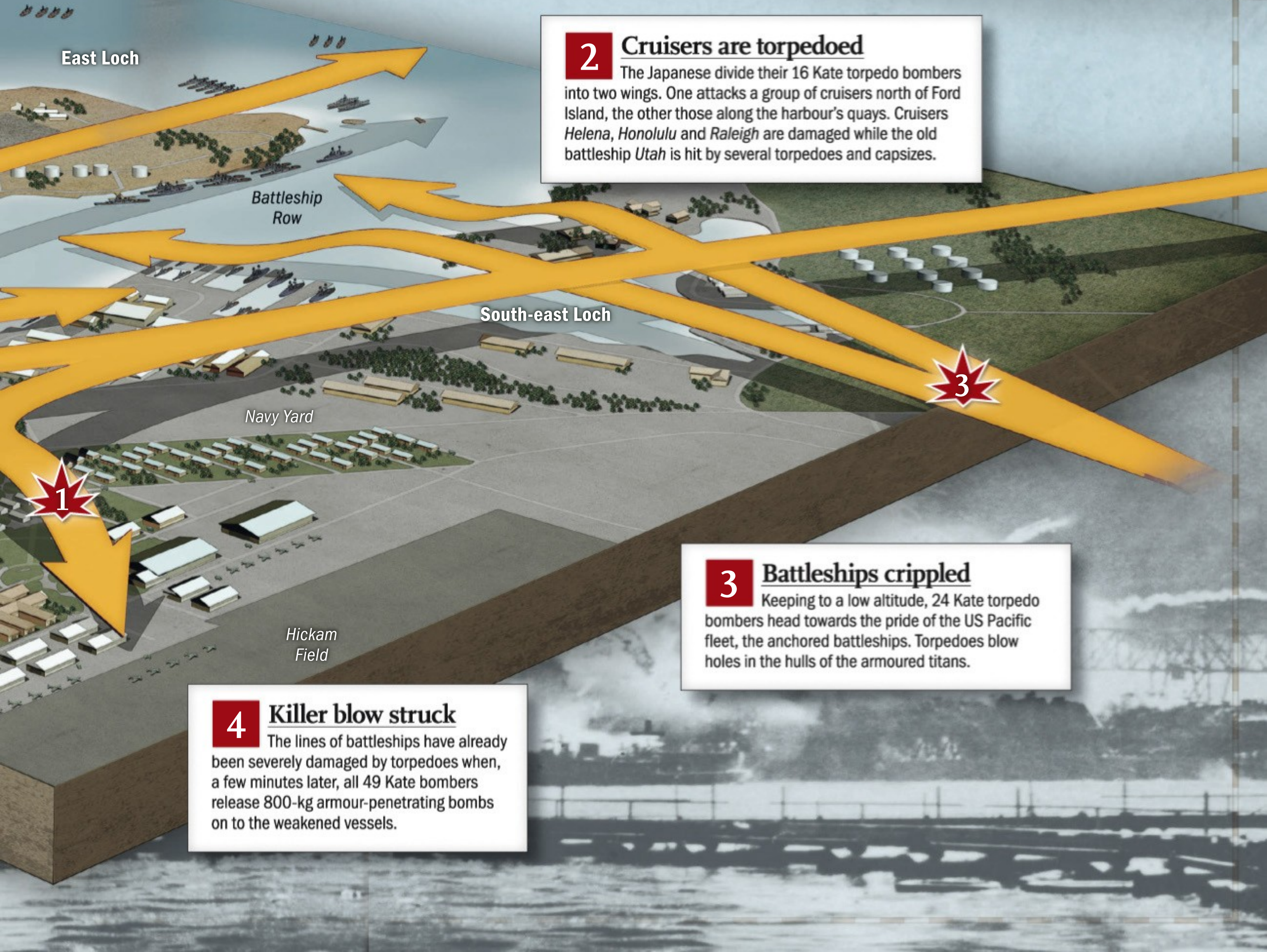
ZERO FIGHTERS	36
KATE BOMBERS	54
VAL DIVE BOMBERS	78

MAIN OBJECTIVES:

- Sink the battleships and other naval vessels that survived the first wave.
- Make further attacks on US airfields and secondary targets.

Leather helmets and flight goggles were standard issue for Japanese pilots.





2 Cruisers are torpedoed

The Japanese divide their 16 Kate torpedo bombers into two wings. One attacks a group of cruisers north of Ford Island, the other those along the harbour's quays. Cruisers *Helena*, *Honolulu* and *Raleigh* are damaged while the old battleship *Utah* is hit by several torpedoes and capsizes.

3 Battleships crippled

Keeping to a low altitude, 24 Kate torpedo bombers head towards the pride of the US Pacific fleet, the anchored battleships. Torpedoes blow holes in the hulls of the armoured titans.

4 Killer blow struck

The lines of battleships have already been severely damaged by torpedoes when, a few minutes later, all 49 Kate bombers release 800-kg armour-penetrating bombs on to the weakened vessels.

encountering any ships along the way, but if any foreign vessels did discover them, the Japanese captains had orders to sink them: the Americans must not learn of their approach.

The fleet was about 1,500 kilometres east of Japan when a coded message came from Admiral Yamamoto: "*Niitakayama Nobore*" ("Climb Mount Niitaka"). This was the signal for fleet commander Admiral Nagumo to open his sealed orders.

"Our emperor has decided to go to war against the United States, Britain and Holland," Nagumo read. The attack would go ahead as planned.

US OFFICER IGNORED RADAR SIGNAL

At around 07.00 on Sunday, 7th December, a US radar station on the northern tip of Oahu picked up a strong signal from out at sea. But the news didn't travel beyond the duty officer, who assumed that the radar had registered six B-17 bombers, which he knew were coming from the US mainland. It meant that the Americans were taken completely by surprise when bombs began raining down on Wheeler Field airfield. Fuel-tank explosions created a sea of fire as long rows of closely parked US fighter planes were set alight. Within minutes, other Oahu airfields were also being hit.

Commander Fuchida was satisfied so far. As one of the most highly respected pilots in the empire, he was the ideal man to plan and lead the mission. Fuchida combined a mild and thoughtful outlook with deadly efficiency. The commander had coordinated all preparations for the air attack and was now himself in place high above the target.

At 07.53, his radio operator broadcast the message "Tora! Tora! Tora!" to the assault fleet. *Tora* is Japanese for tiger, and the signal confirmed that the attack was underway and that the attackers had achieved complete surprise.

A few minutes later, the squadron reached Pearl Harbor itself. About 90 vessels of differing sizes were in the port, but Japan's key target was the row of eight heavily armoured and highly armed battleships.

The attackers considered the battleships to be more dangerous than the US Pacific Navy's aircraft carriers, all of which were away from the harbour that morning. By taking out all the battleships at Pearl Harbor, Japanese leaders believed they'd weaken America's resolve to fight – and ensure military supremacy for at least six months.

The Americans hadn't placed any torpedo nets in the harbour or put up barrage balloons because they felt safe in their Hawaiian base. As a result, there was nothing to stop the Kate bombers from coming in low and dropping their payloads. The five-metre-long torpedoes broke the water's surface, leaving a bow wave behind them as they streaked towards the anchored battleships. Moments later, a series of explosions rocked the ships' heavy metal hulls.

BATTLESHIP WENT UP IN FLAMES

At Ford Island airfield in the middle of the harbour, Captain Logan Ramsey was in the command centre when a plane flew past at close range. At first Ramsey thought it was one of the young US pilots. "Get that guy's number," the officer shouted. Then Ramsey heard the drone of the same plane dropping its

Japan put everything into the surprise attack

The Japanese assembled the most powerful aircraft-carrier fleet ever seen to ensure that the naval base at Pearl Harbor was utterly destroyed.

On 26th November 1941 a mighty fleet left Japan. At the force's heart were the six large aircraft carriers *Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Soryu*, *Hiryu*, *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku*. With a total of more than 420 aircraft, the fleet was by far the strongest aircraft-carrier armada ever assembled.

The carriers were protected by two battleships and three cruisers. A number of submarines were also included, which were sent to Pearl Harbor in advance. Mini-subs also featured in the attack. They were ordered to enter the naval base and sink any ships that escaped the torpedoes. This part of the operation failed, however.

The fleet was under the command of the experienced but cautious Chuichi Nagumo. The admiral had been ordered not to sail into US waters if the naval force was discovered or if a diplomatic solution could be found before the attack was due to take place.

The activity on board the Japanese aircraft carriers was hectic before the planes took off.

FACTS

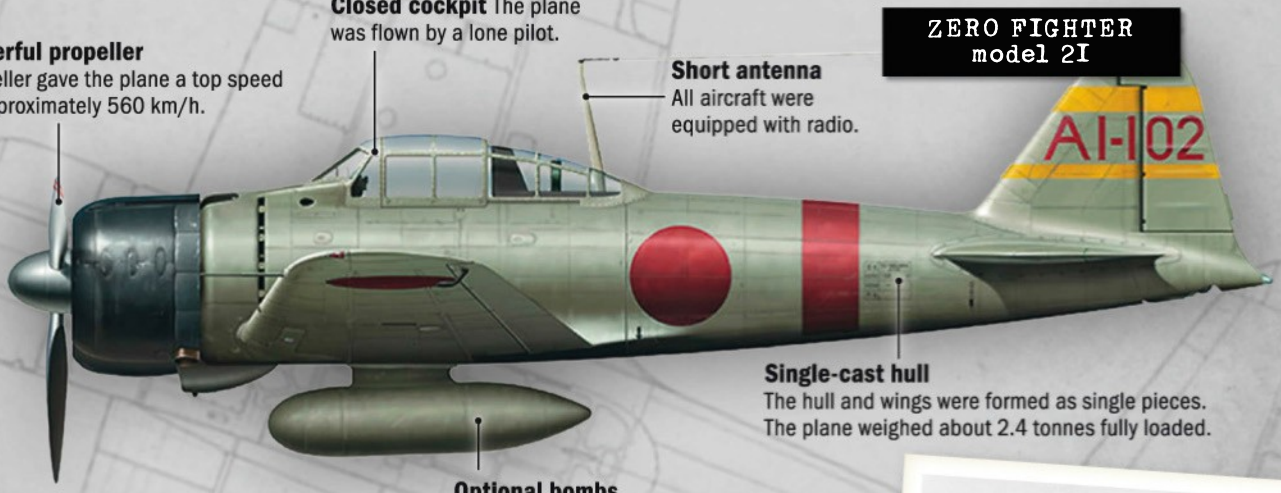
JAPANESE ATTACK

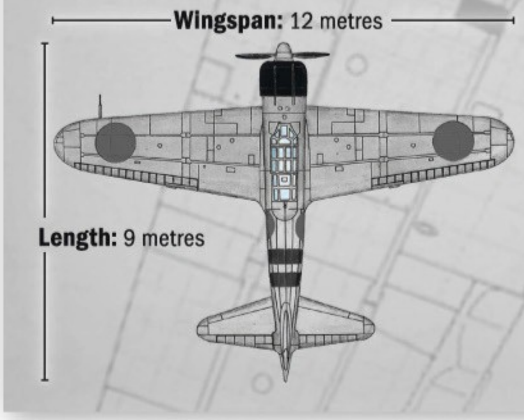
Aircraft carriers	6
Battleships	2
Cruisers	3
Destroyers	9
Submarines	23

- In addition to warships, the Japanese fleet also had eight tankers that could keep the warships supplied at sea.

Japanese wasp ravaged the Pacific

The Japanese war industry manufactured over 10,000 A6M 'Zero' aircraft. The fighter was light and highly manoeuvrable, but its top-speed was relatively modest.


ZERO FIGHTER
model 21
AI-102
Closed cockpit The plane was flown by a lone pilot.
Powerful propeller Propeller gave the plane a top speed of approximately 560 km/h.
Short antenna All aircraft were equipped with radio.
Single-cast hull The hull and wings were formed as single pieces. The plane weighed about 2.4 tonnes fully loaded.
Optional bombs The Zero was a fighter but could be equipped with one or two bombs.


Wingspan: 12 metres
Length: 9 metres

At the end of their briefing, Japanese pilots swore to do their duty before taking off from the aircraft carriers.

missile. "Never mind, it's a Jap!" he exclaimed and ran into the radio room where he sent the message: "AIR RAID ON PEARL HARBOR X THIS IS NOT DRILL".

At 07.58, the message went out on all local frequencies, while Japanese aircraft swarmed around their targets. At the same time, 49 Kate bombers approached from three kilometres up, armed with 800-kg armour-piercing bombs. At around 08.00, the bombers pulled their triggers, releasing their payloads, which fell onto the weakened battleships.

From his place high in the sky, Fuchida saw the glow of light from a huge explosion. A thick column of smoke and fire shot up one kilometre into the air, and a moment later his Kate bomber was buffeted by the blast. A bomb had drilled through two armoured decks on the battleship USS *Arizona* and ignited the forward ammunition magazine, which ripped the thick sides of the ship like a tin can.

Within seconds, large parts of the *Arizona* were engulfed in flames, and the 185-metre-long ship began its short journey to the bottom of the shallow harbour. Hundreds of men were trapped in the burning interior, and 1,177 of the *Arizona's* 1,400-man crew were killed in the biggest disaster in US naval history. High above the gruesome scenes in the port, Fuchida could see that the first attack wave had hit the American battleships and airfields hard. As the other planes returned to the aircraft carriers, he was above Pearl Harbor, ready to watch the next attack wave. 168 aircraft had taken off from the aircraft carriers one hour after the first wave and now approached rapidly from the north.

Outside the naval base, civilians had followed the dramatic scenes. Some believed that they were witnessing an exercise while others feared that a Japanese landing was on its way.

Japanese officers were still equipped with swords.

UNDAMAGED PLANES TOOK TO THE SKIES

At 09.00, the next attack wave appeared over Pearl Harbor. The Americans were over the initial shock, and now the port's anti-aircraft guns were manned. Grey-black clouds from exploding shells filled the sky around the Japanese planes, while American pilots scrambled to take

For 70 years, this was one of the most famous images from the attack on Pearl Harbor. But in 2011, the photograph was revealed to have been taken during a fire drill.

any undamaged fighters up into the skies.

Japanese commander Lieutenant Takashige Egusa's 78 Val dive bombers had the most difficult task. His planes had to dive through a fierce barrage of fire and thick oily smoke to hit those battleships that had escaped the first wave of bombing.

The USS *Nevada* was the only one of the eight that could still manoeuvre, despite having received a direct hit from a torpedo. The 23 Val dive bombers dropped their 250-kg bombs and after a series of explosions, the *Nevada* began to take on water. To save the ship from sinking, the captain ran the ship aground.

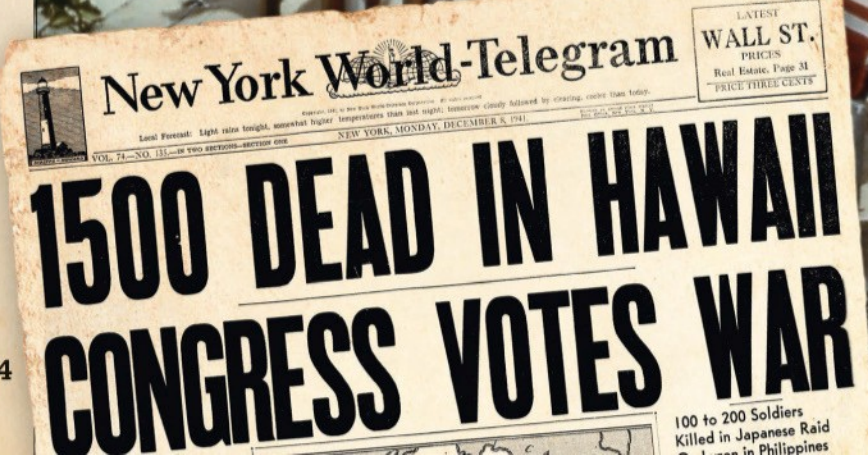
JAPANESE SUFFERED MINIMAL LOSSES

As the planes from the attack headed back to the north, a silence descended over Pearl Harbor. At 11.00, Fuchida flew a final circuit and noted carefully which ships had been hit. Two hours later, the commander landed on the aircraft carrier *Akagi*, where he and Admiral Nagumo discussed whether another attack wave should be sent, but decided against it.

American losses were significant: 2,403 people were dead and 21 warships had been sunk or rendered unusable. The Japanese had lost just 29 aircraft and 64 men.

The day after the attack, US President Roosevelt spoke to Congress in Washington. "Yesterday, December 7, 1941, a date which will live in infamy" were the opening words of his speech, which asked Congress to ratify the decision to take the United States of America into a war against Japan. It was a formality because the Japanese ambassador had already handed over a declaration of war the day before, and on 11th December, Germany and Italy followed suit. Like it or not, the US had been forced into World War II.

US sailors lay wreaths on the graves of their fallen comrades in spring 1942.



New York World-Telegram

LATEST
WALL ST.
PRICES
Real Estate, Page 31
PRICE THREE CENTS

Local Forecast: Light rains tonight, somewhat higher temperatures than last night; tomorrow cloudy followed by clearing, cooler than today.

NEW YORK, MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1941.

VOL. 74.—NO. 135.—IN TWO SECTIONS—SECTION ONE

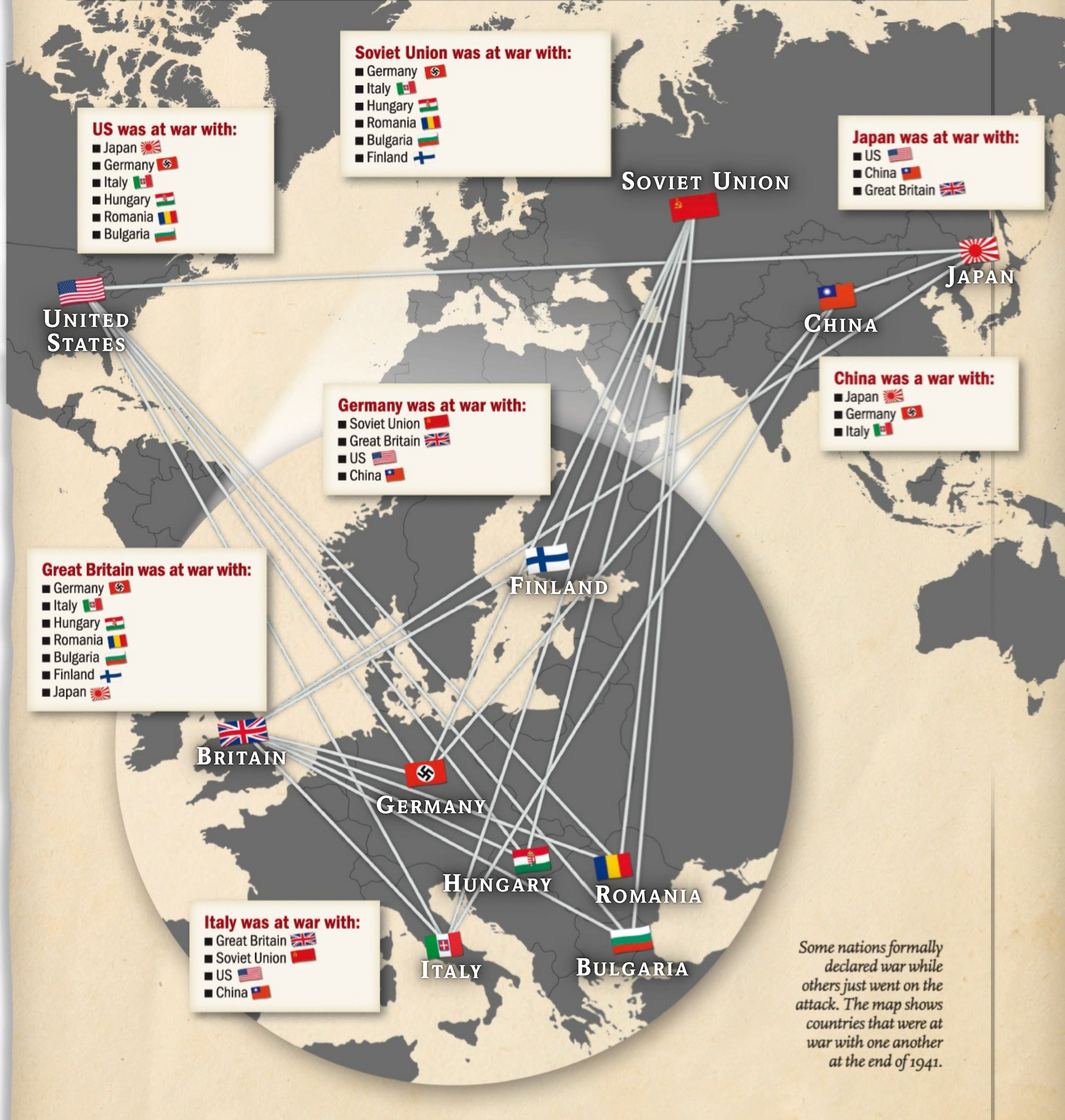
1500 DEAD IN HAWAII

CONGRESS VOTES WAR

100 to 200 Soldiers
Killed in Japanese Raid
in Philippines

Whole world was at war

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 drew the US into the war. Two large blocs now faced one another: the Allies and the Axis powers. By now, the conflict had touched almost every part of the world and was the most widespread in history.


Soviet Union
Japan
United States
China
Finland
Britain
Germany
Hungary
Romania
Italy
Bulgaria

Soviet Union was at war with:
- Germany
- Italy
- Hungary
- Romania
- Bulgaria
- Finland

US was at war with:
- Japan
- Germany
- Italy
- Hungary
- Romania
- Bulgaria

Japan was at war with:
- US
- China
- Great Britain

China was a war with:
- Japan
- Germany
- Italy

Germany was at war with:
- Soviet Union
- Great Britain
- US
- China

Great Britain was at war with:
- Germany
- Italy
- Hungary
- Romania
- Bulgaria
- Finland
- Japan

Italy was at war with:
- Great Britain
- Soviet Union
- US
- China

Some nations formally declared war while others just went on the attack. The map shows countries that were at war with one another at the end of 1941.

The city was quickly reduced to a maze of ruins. Soviet soldiers lay in wait among the rubble, and the Germans felt they were fighting an invisible foe.

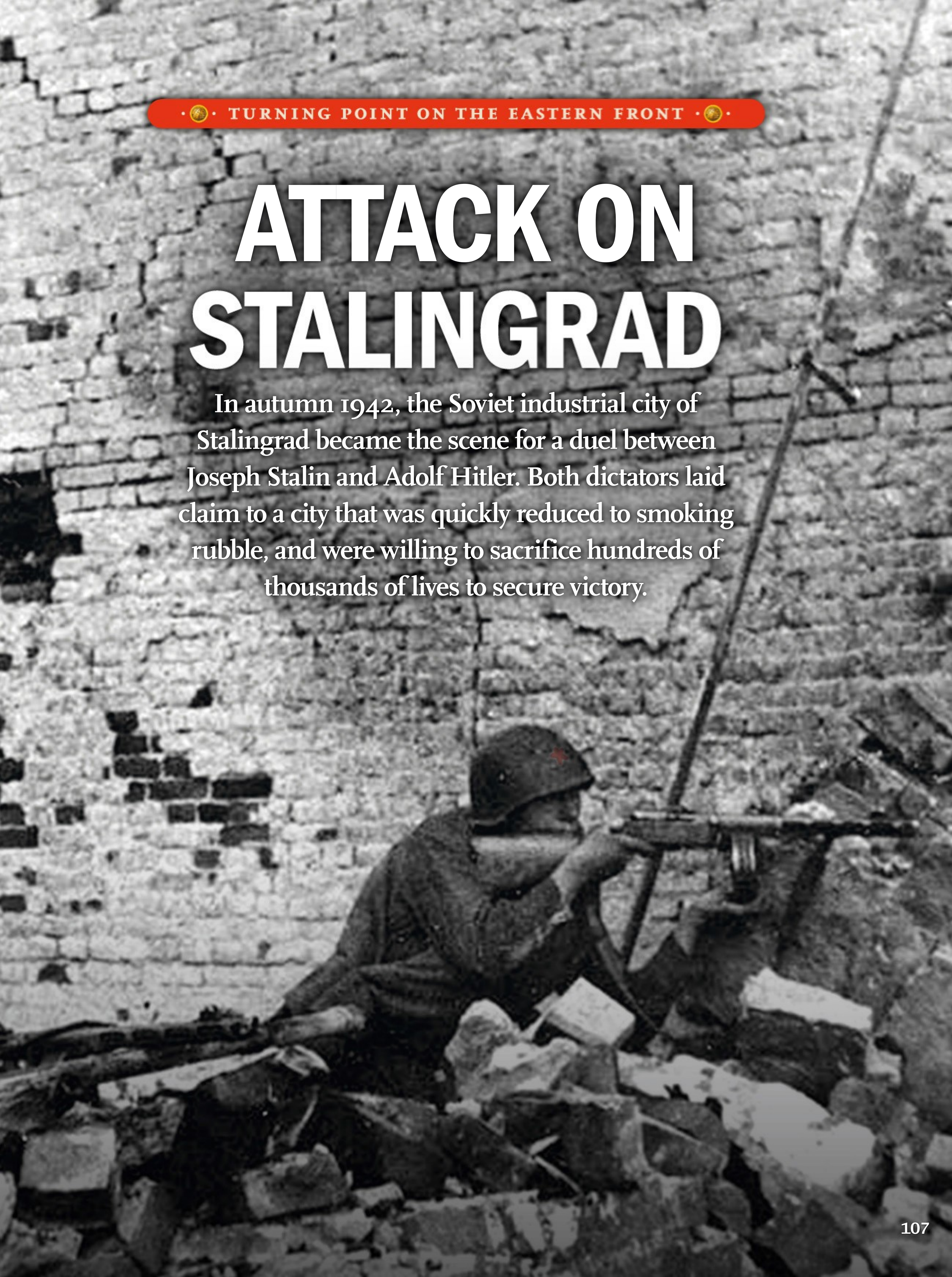
1942

13TH SEPTEMBER

TURNING POINT ON THE EASTERN FRONT

ATTACK ON STALINGRAD

In autumn 1942, the Soviet industrial city of Stalingrad became the scene for a duel between Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler. Both dictators laid claim to a city that was quickly reduced to smoking rubble, and were willing to sacrifice hundreds of thousands of lives to secure victory.



Stalingrad 1942

THE STAGE IS SET

In June 1941, Germany invades the Soviet Union. The following year, Hitler's troops reach Stalingrad and advance into the city. But the street battles prove a bigger challenge than Germany anticipated, and there's no turning back. Stalin wants to keep the city at all costs while Hitler refuses to allow his troops to withdraw.

Russia
Stalingrad

An incredible sight met young Soviet soldier Mikhail Panikakha when he arrived on the east bank of the river Volga one night in late September 1942. On the far side of the river, Stalingrad was lit up like a torch from flames and explosions, as tracer bullets and searchlights danced about in the sky. In the middle of this inferno, raw Soviet recruits attempted to slow the German advance into the ruins of this once-thriving industrial city.

The desperate defenders' only lifeline was the Volga, where an armada of barges and small boats ferried food, ammunition, and reinforcements from the eastern side every night. That night, Panikakha and his comrades from the 883rd Rifle Regiment crossed the river and were immediately sent to the front line where rubble and stinking corpses lay everywhere. Exhausted soldiers would tell the newcomers that the average lifespan of recruits in Stalingrad was just a few days.

THE CITY MUST BE DEFENDED TO THE LAST MAN

On 1st October – three days after his arrival in Stalingrad – Panikakha lay in a trench at the Red October steelworks when a German tank rolled towards him. He ignited the rags that served as primitive fuses for two Molotov cocktails, but manage spill part of the flammable liquid over himself.

His uniform was already in flames when he jumped out of his hiding place and ran like a human torch towards the armoured colossus. Panikakha smashed the bottles on the tank's front grille and it exploded in a fireball. His sacrifice was perfect for Soviet propaganda: Panikakha was the type of soldier the

The Germans entered Stalingrad in mid-September, and a five-month bloody nightmare began.

NAME **FRIEDRICH PAULUS**

TITLE **FIELD MARSHAL**

1890-1957

Paulus was Hitler's hero

Friedrich Paulus was regarded as a competent staff officer, who always obeyed orders. In Hitler's eyes, this made him the perfect candidate when the strong 6th Army needed a new commander in 1942. Paulus led the siege of Stalingrad and obediently followed instructions from Berlin instead of making his own plans for capturing the devastated city.

- **Began as a cadet in 1910.**
- **Spent 10 years in prison.**

NAME **VASILY CHUIKOV**

TITLE **MARSHAL**

1900-1982

Chuikov had a free hand

Vasily Chuikov was given the task of leading the Soviet 62nd Army in the defence of Stalingrad. The Germans had superior numbers and weapons, but Chuikov adapted his units and tactics to the city's ruins. He remained in Stalingrad even when his troops only held a small bridgehead on the river. The Red Army's commanders could not dictate orders during battles, giving him a freer hand than any other Soviet general.

- **Was military attaché in China until 1942.**
- **Participated in the capture of Berlin.**

Red Army needed to defend Stalingrad, and soon leaflets at the front called on others to follow his example.

Powerful German forces had reached the city's outskirts in late August 1942. They were part of Hitler's huge *Fall Blau* (Case Blue) offensive, its ultimate aim to capture the Caucasus and its vast oil fields. In the original German plan, Stalingrad was only a secondary target, but Stalin believed Soviet forces' morale would plummet if the city bearing his name fell into enemy hands. The dictator consequently demanded that Stalingrad be defended to the last man.

Despite this, the city would receive no reinforcements because Stalin feared a German offensive against Moscow, and so the Red Army's weak 62nd Army would have to fight alone. Its complement consisted of poorly trained soldiers who'd already suffered heavy losses in battles west of the city and were now relying on help from local workers' militias. On the opposite side stood the imposing German 6th Army, comprising 250,000 men and whose commander, General Friedrich Paulus, anticipated a swift victory. On 13th September he sent his divisions forward.

ODDS WEIGHED HEAVILY IN GERMANS' FAVOUR

A Soviet soldier described with horror the sight of the German armoured columns and combat troops. "It looked like a terrible swarm of black insects was devouring Stalingrad. They were so well-armed and equipped – and more and more of them kept coming: we thought they were going to roll right over us."

> **"A swarm of black insects was devouring Stalingrad"**
>
> A Soviet soldier on the German armoured columns

Within a few hours the Germans had captured the Mamaev Kurgan, a hill that stood between the city centre and the industrial area to the north, giving Hitler's forces a clear vantage point down the Volga. Meanwhile, other Germans advanced into the heart of the city, where they approached the vital ferry crossing at ominous speed.

The invaders had around twice as many soldiers as the 62nd Army, five times as many tanks and enjoyed complete air supremacy. Only a ruthless decision saved the city from falling on just the second day of the battle. Several weeks of German air strikes had already taught Soviet troops to only cross the Volga under cover of nightfall. But on 14th September, the 62nd Army in Stalingrad was in such a precarious position that several thousand soldiers were commanded to cross the river to support them in full daylight.

The boats sailed through bombs, grenades, and projectiles, and fewer than half of the defenceless soldiers survived the trip. But the survivors were immediately thrown into a counterattack that prevented a swift German victory.

PEASANT'S SON TOOK COMMAND

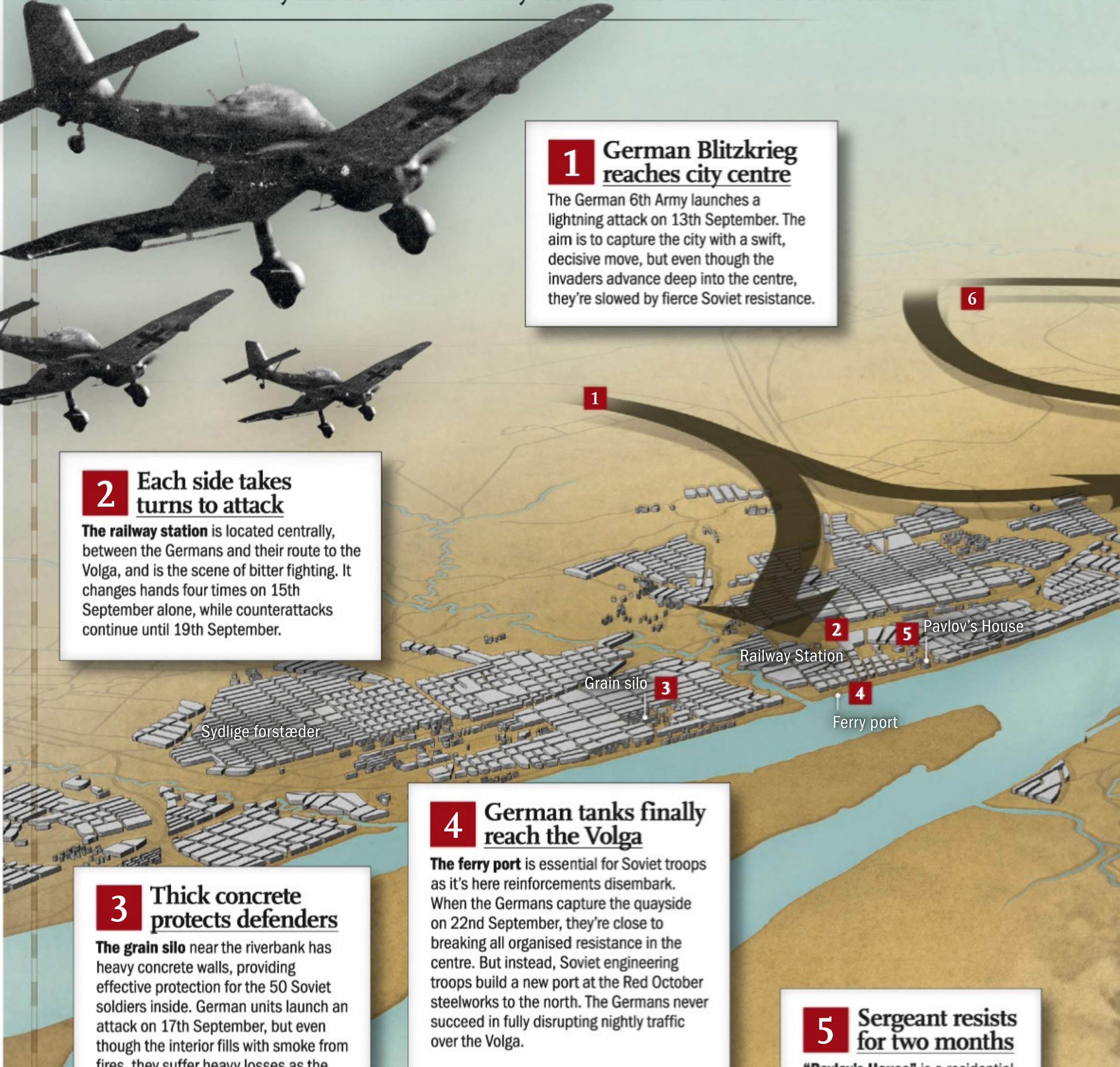
Over the following weeks each new German offensive threatened to push the Soviets into the Volga. But after the initial shock, Lieutenant General Vasily Chuikov began to settle the defences. The 42-year-old had been given command of the 62nd Army shortly before the Germans attacked, and he was a warrior by nature. He combined raw strength with an explosive temper, inherited from a peasant father who had been a skilled wrestler and bare-knuckle boxer.

His fury at those officers who did not meet his high expectations often spilled over into physical violence. But the rank-and-file troops came to love him because Chuikov was like them: coarse facial features, dark and bushy hair as well as a rough sense of humour. And he was never far from the front line. Where his counterpart Paulus would bark his orders from calm surroundings 100 kilometres behind the front, Chuikov's headquarters lay at the heart of Stalingrad's inferno throughout the battle.

"The impact on us was colossal: our own chief was there with us, in the middle of this hell. We gained fresh determination to hold onto our positions," one company commander said of the general who often visited the trenches wearing his distinctive black greatcoat. Chuikov also urged his officers to share their more generous rations

Battle destroyed the city

In 1942, Stalingrad was a city with 400,000 residents. During the bloody fighting in the streets, the German 6th Army and Soviet 62nd Army lost over one million men between them.



1 German Blitzkrieg reaches city centre

The German 6th Army launches a lightning attack on 13th September. The aim is to capture the city with a swift, decisive move, but even though the invaders advance deep into the centre, they're slowed by fierce Soviet resistance.

2 Each side takes turns to attack

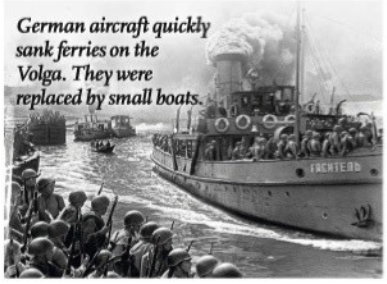
The railway station is located centrally, between the Germans and their route to the Volga, and is the scene of bitter fighting. It changes hands four times on 15th September alone, while counterattacks continue until 19th September.

3 Thick concrete protects defenders

The grain silo near the riverbank has heavy concrete walls, providing effective protection for the 50 Soviet soldiers inside. German units launch an attack on 17th September, but even though the interior fills with smoke from fires, they suffer heavy losses as the defenders hold firm for five days.

4 German tanks finally reach the Volga

The ferry port is essential for Soviet troops as it's here reinforcements disembark. When the Germans capture the quayside on 22nd September, they're close to breaking all organised resistance in the centre. But instead, Soviet engineering troops build a new port at the Red October steelworks to the north. The Germans never succeed in fully disrupting nightly traffic over the Volga.



German aircraft quickly sank ferries on the Volga. They were replaced by small boats.

5 Sergeant resists for two months

"Pavlov's House" is a residential building within the Soviet defensive line. Here, Sergeant Yakoy Pavlov continues to fight with a handful of Soviet soldiers even after the rest of the city centre has fallen. The small band repel all German attacks for the rest of the battle.

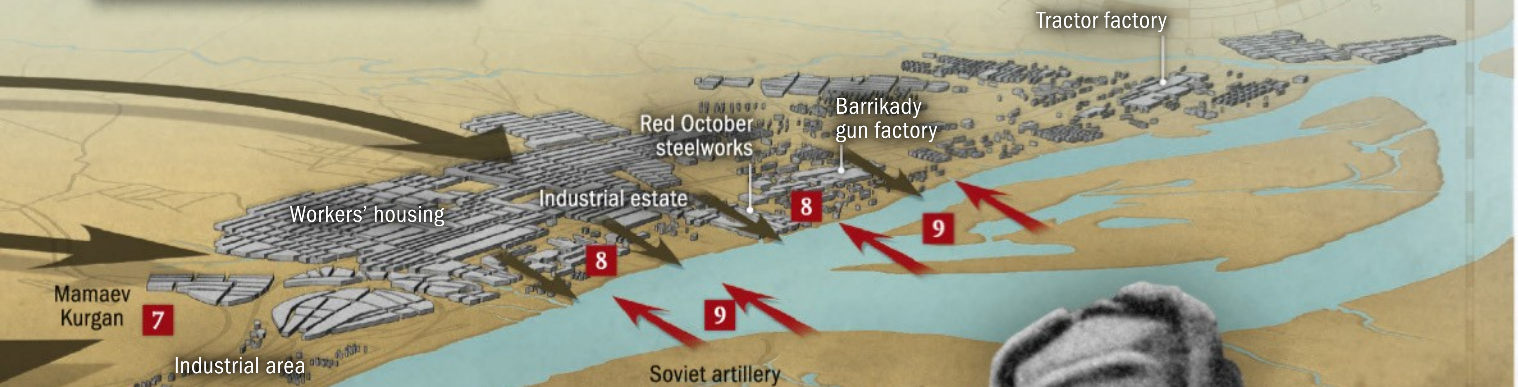
8 The German offensive is a bloody nightmare

In the industrial district, Soviets continue to stubbornly produce weapons throughout the battle. Soviet tanks roll directly from the assembly line to the front nearby. For German troops, the advance into the industrial area is even worse than when they attacked Stalingrad's centre. Whole divisions are committed to the fray, where they must pay dearly for every square metre captured.

The battle for the factories lasted one gruelling month.

9 Attack stalls

On 14th October, German troops go forward with renewed vigour, and day by day they fight from factory to factory. But the 62nd Army maintains its last landing point along the Volga, and by the end of the month, German forces are exhausted.


Tractor factory
Barrikady gun factory
Red October steelworks
Industrial estate
Workers' housing
8
8
9
9
Mamaev Kurgan
7
Industrial area
Soviet artillery

7 The Red Army strikes first

Mamaev Kurgan is a hill that towers 102 metres above the Volga and offers good all-round visibility. Attacks and counterattacks sweep back and forth across its summit from day one of the battle. On 27th September, as the Germans are about to launch their attack to the north, Soviet storm groups attack the slopes.

6 New campaign aims to end the battle

On 27th September, a new German thrust begins. Its aim is to end the resistance in Stalingrad's industrial area before the harsh Soviet winter sets in.

Street battles cost both sides dearly. The wounded were patched up and shipped out of the city.

1,000 tonnes of bombs rained down on Stalingrad prior to the army's attack.

Aerial attacks cost the lives of at least 30,000 of Stalingrad's 400,000 inhabitants. The survivors moved into caves dug into the cliffs near the city.

of butter, biscuits, sugar, and cigarettes with their men, and forbade them to use their rank to obtain privileges. The common suffering among the ruins created a special spirit among the 62nd Army, despite its horrific losses. The general's greatest asset, however, was his tactical acumen that helped him understand the specialised demands of urban warfare.

> **"Our own chief was there with us, in the middle of this hell"**
>
> Company commander on General Chuikov

Houses were fortresses

Stalin had made his position clear. "Not one step back!" Order Number 227 declared. Any officer who allowed his men to retreat would be brought before a war tribunal.

Chuikov's main defensive line consisted of a series of heavily fortified positions located in the city's most solid buildings. They were surrounded by barbed wire and mines, so the Germans had difficulty getting close to them.

These makeshift fortresses served as breakwaters to make a co-ordinated advance difficult for the Germans. When the posts were attacked, their crews summoned aid from a steadily growing number of gun batteries on the Volga's east bank.

"The Fascist troops will shatter upon these obstacles as sea waves are broken by granite rock," Chuikov declared in terms his soldiers could understand.

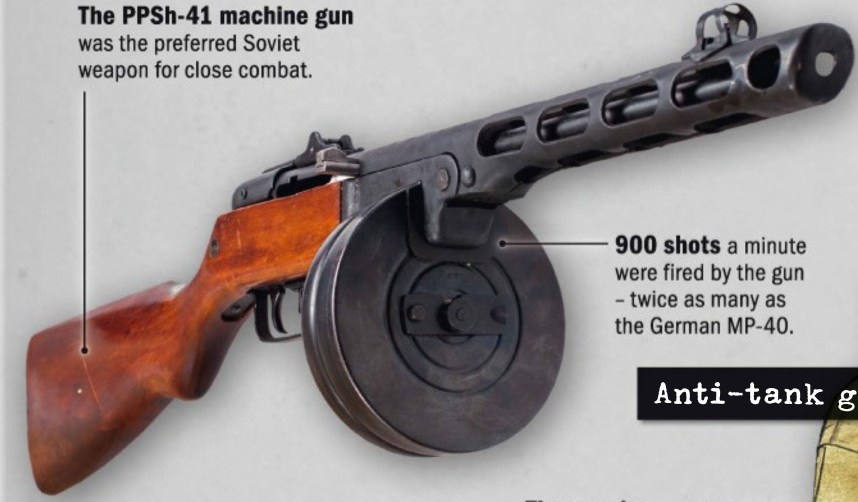
A property on Penzenskaya Street held special meaning for the soldiers of the 62nd Army, for it was frequently mentioned in Soviet propaganda. The building, which became known as "Pavlov's House", housed a Soviet garrison led by Sergeant Yakov Pavlov, who stubbornly fought on long after all other Soviet forces had been driven away. The official report stated that he'd stormed the building with just 25 men, prepared to make the ultimate self-sacrifice.

But several eyewitnesses recalled that Pavlov's House was both strongly fortified and well-staffed. Soviet soldiers stayed in basements and bunkers between fighting, where they were better protected from shells. In the basement of Pavlov's House, the men cooked food on a cast iron stove, and even slept on mattresses, but always with their boots on.

The basement also housed several families who hadn't managed to flee the city in time. Here a pregnant woman gave birth to a girl named Sina, whose father had been a soldier who'd fallen in the first days of the battle. The newborn was given no hope of surviving, but Pavlov's men, who

Weapons for urban warfare

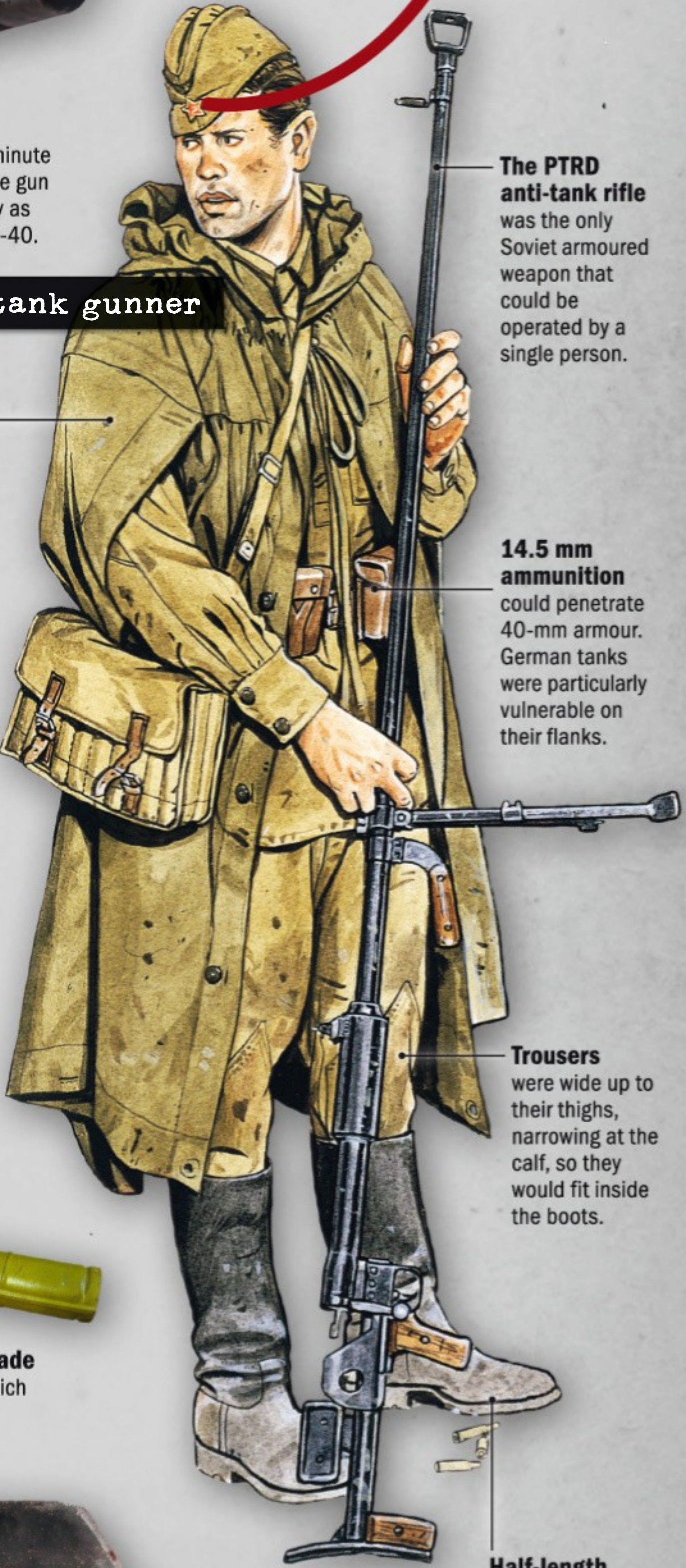
Soviet soldiers used both grenades and spades for close-quarter combat in the city's ruins. In open spaces, battle raged between tanks and anti-tank weapons.



The PPSh-41 machine gun was the preferred Soviet weapon for close combat.

900 shots a minute were fired by the gun – twice as many as the German MP-40.

The beret's red star revealed that the gunner belonged to the Red Army.



Anti-tank gunner

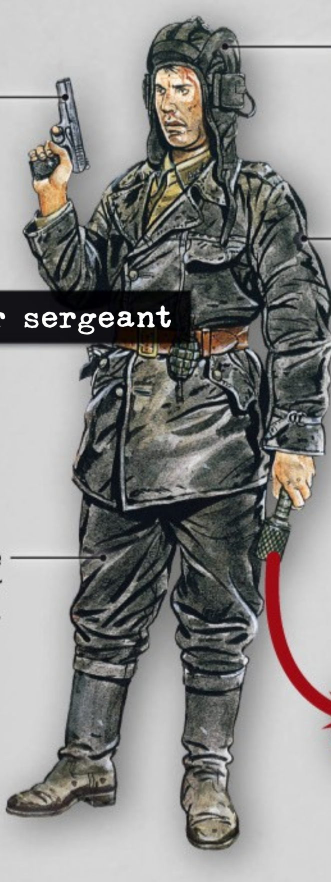
The PTRD anti-tank rifle was the only Soviet armoured weapon that could be operated by a single person.

The poncho provided protection against rain, plus served as camouflage in the city's grey ruins.

14.5 mm ammunition could penetrate 40-mm armour. German tanks were particularly vulnerable on their flanks.

Trousers were wide up to their thighs, narrowing at the calf, so they would fit inside the boots.

Half-length boots were standard footwear for all soldiers in the Red Army.



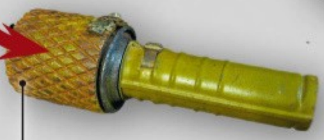
Senior sergeant

The gun was the semi-automatic TT-33, a widespread Soviet handgun.

Leather helmet with built-in radio indicated that the man was part of a tank crew.

Black leather jacket was the winter uniform for tank squadron personnel.

Trousers were black leather like the jacket.



RGD-33 hand grenade had a steel jacket, which exploded in a lethal shower of shrapnel.

The spade was razor sharp and used as a silent weapon during night raids on German positions.

otherwise quickly acclimatised to the suffering around them, dared to provide food for the nursing mother. Sina survived.

Chuikov quickly realised during the early exchanges how to nullify the Germans' superiority in both aircraft and guns. He ordered his troops to "hug" the enemy. Distances between both front lines should be as short as possible – as little as 25-50 metres, preferably – so the Germans couldn't bombard Soviet positions without also hitting their own.

"If the enemy is trying to create distance between our forces we don't let him do it", Chuikov instructed his Soviet units.

"STALIN'S ORGANS" STOOD ALONG THE RIVER

The only Soviet artillery on the Volga's west bank were Katyusha rocket launchers. The Germans called them "Stalin's Organs", and they were mounted on trucks that hid behind the river's high banks. The vehicles drove down to the water's edge to fire all 16 rockets in quick succession, before driving back to cover. Their mobility made them difficult to hit.

On the Volga's eastern shore, thousands of Soviet guns were set up so they could rain shells down on German positions in Stalingrad. The artillery units were designated targets by Soviet observers who hid inside the city's ruins. The challenge lay in targeting German units of a certain size that could be hit without simultaneously taking out Soviet soldiers.

62ND ARMY FOUGHT AT NIGHT

Where the Germans tried to create order and clarity, Chuikov adapted to the inevitable chaos of street battles in the shattered city. Instead of large operations involving thousands of soldiers, he divided his men into storm groups of only 50 to 80 men who could better move through Stalingrad's labyrinthine ruins. Each group was split into a storming party, plus consolidation, and reserve groups. Units operated after sunset when they could move without fear of air raids. Germans were usually resting to restore strength for the next day, and rarely ventured out in the darkness when artillery and aircraft were unable to provide targeted support.

Soviet private Suren Mirzoyan described a night attack on the state bank, where 30 German soldiers were based. The Soviets blasted their way into the building only to find themselves so close to the enemy that they had to battle with knives and spades. Mirzoyan found himself being strangled by a German, but slashed at his neck with his knife.

"This kind of close combat is unlike anything else. Once you are inside a building a machine gun is no longer any use, there is no time to load it, and no room to use it effectively. Knives and small, sharp spades are the best weapons for storm group fighting – it is all about physical toughness and quick reflexes," he recalled.

Close-quarter fighting terrified the Germans, as did the inevitable ambushes where Soviet soldiers suddenly attacked patrols from the rear. As German units moved forward, Chuikov's storm groups sneaked behind them using sewers, buildings, and basements where they'd previously bored a hole in the partition walls.

Wilhem Hoffman was a soldier with the German 94th Infantry Division and took

Some snipers preferred to hunt their prey alone, but small groups could provide cover for each other.

FACTS

SNIPERS

Soviet snipers made great inroads into the German lines. They hunted alone or in small groups and were at the enemy's mercy if their position was discovered, so they followed the snipers' four commandments:

- **Change position.** Move after each shot.
- **Find next position.** Always know in advance where your next position is.
- **Choose far-off targets.** Don't shoot at nearby targets. If you do, the enemy can judge the distance and direction of your shot.
- **Keep calm.** Any careless movement can expose you.

part in the battle for Stalingrad's centre. He noted his disgust in his diary: "You don't see them at all, they have established themselves in houses and cellars and are firing on all sides, including from our rear – barbarians, they use gangster methods… Stalingrad is hell."

The battle continued with heavy losses and untold suffering on both sides until the end of September, when Stalingrad's centre was finally in German hands.

But this was just the first act, and the next was about to begin – with even greater ferocity and yet more casualties.

"Rat War" frustrated the Germans

The Germans' strength lay in blitzkrieg warfare, thrusting deep into enemy territory at high speed. But Stalingrad afforded none of these advantages. The ruins hid Soviet positions and snipers, who added to the casualty lists each day.

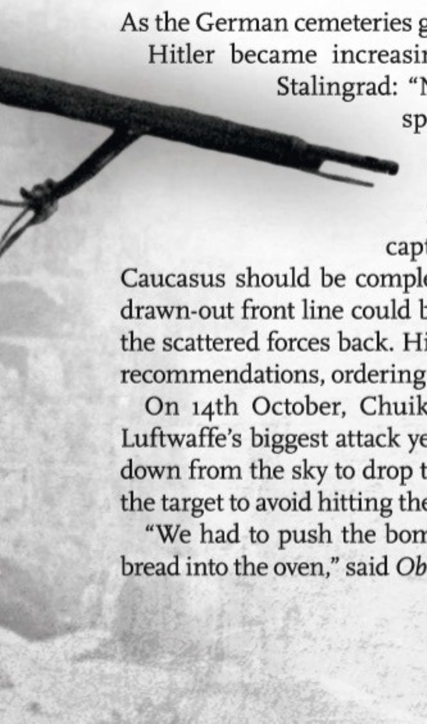
"The enemy is invisible," wrote a frustrated General Karl Strecker, highly respected chief of XI Corps, to a friend. The Germans dubbed these tactics as *Rattenkrieg* ("Rat War"), and joked bitterly about how they had to fight on for the bedroom and living room long after capturing the kitchen.

The rank-and-file detested close combat, where they never had a moment to catch their breath, and death was a constant threat. The battle for a four-storey warehouse became a typical example of the chaotic front. The opposing parties sat like layers of a cake with Germans controlling the top and bottom floors, while the Soviets stubbornly defended those in the middle. Everyone's uniforms were covered with the same greyish brown dust, making it hard to distinguish friend from foe.

> **"No man will shift us from this spot"**
>
> Hitler in a speech to Berliners on 30th September 1942

Stalin and Hitler were – of course – far removed from the harsh reality of the daily struggles. The original strategic reasons for capturing or holding Stalingrad were soon forgotten – now it was purely about ego. The battle must be won no matter the cost, and tens of thousands of fresh troops were thrown into the fray.

Smoke and dust obliterated sun



As the German cemeteries grew larger behind the front line, Hitler became increasingly obsessed with capturing Stalingrad: "No man will shift us from this spot," the Führer boasted in a speech to Berliners on 30th September 1942.

His generals warned that the capture of the oil fields in the Caucasus should be completed before winter and that the drawn-out front line could be shortened by pulling some of the scattered forces back. Hitler ignored their warnings and recommendations, ordering a new offensive in Stalingrad.

On 14th October, Chuikov's divisions woke up to the Luftwaffe's biggest attack yet. Stuka dive bombers swooped down from the sky to drop their bomb loads precisely above the target to avoid hitting the German positions.

"We had to push the bombs into the target like loaves of bread into the oven," said *Oberstleutnant* (Wing Commander) Paul-Werner Hozzel, aged 31. The seasoned pilot commanded the Stukas, which flew 12,000 missions over the city. The air strikes were then followed by shelling from more than 2,000 German guns and mortars. High above the battlefield the sun shone, but down on the ground darkness ruled.

"It was no longer possible to see the sun, only a sad brown circlet, peeping through the clouds. Spumes of earth, fire and smoke rose up around us. It was not possible to hear the sound of individual shooting anymore – there was just a rolling, thunderous wall of noise," said Lieutenant Anatoly Mereshko.

Many Soviet soldiers were awarded the "For the Defence of Stalingrad" medal.

The ruins were alive

As the guns fell silent, 90,000 Germans attacked with 300 tanks along a five-kilometre-wide front. Their target was three large factories in Stalingrad where Chuikov still held out.

His 62nd Army comprised only 20,000 soldiers and around 20 operational tanks, but the Soviets had barricaded every street to slow the German tanks, knocked holes in the buildings for anti-tank guns and assembled large stocks of explosives. As the German soldiers and tanks moved forward, Soviet soldiers swarmed from their shelter in the ruins – the heavy bombardment had had little effect.

"[It was] as if we had dropped toy torpedoes instead of bombs," a shocked Hozzel recalled.

Despite the setback, the strong German units still forced the defenders back, and the strip along the Volga dwindled to a mere 200-metre-wide belt. The Germans now controlled 90 percent of Stalingrad and kept the rest under constant shelling. Even the eternally optimistic General Chuikov had difficulty seeing a way out on the afternoon of 15th October.

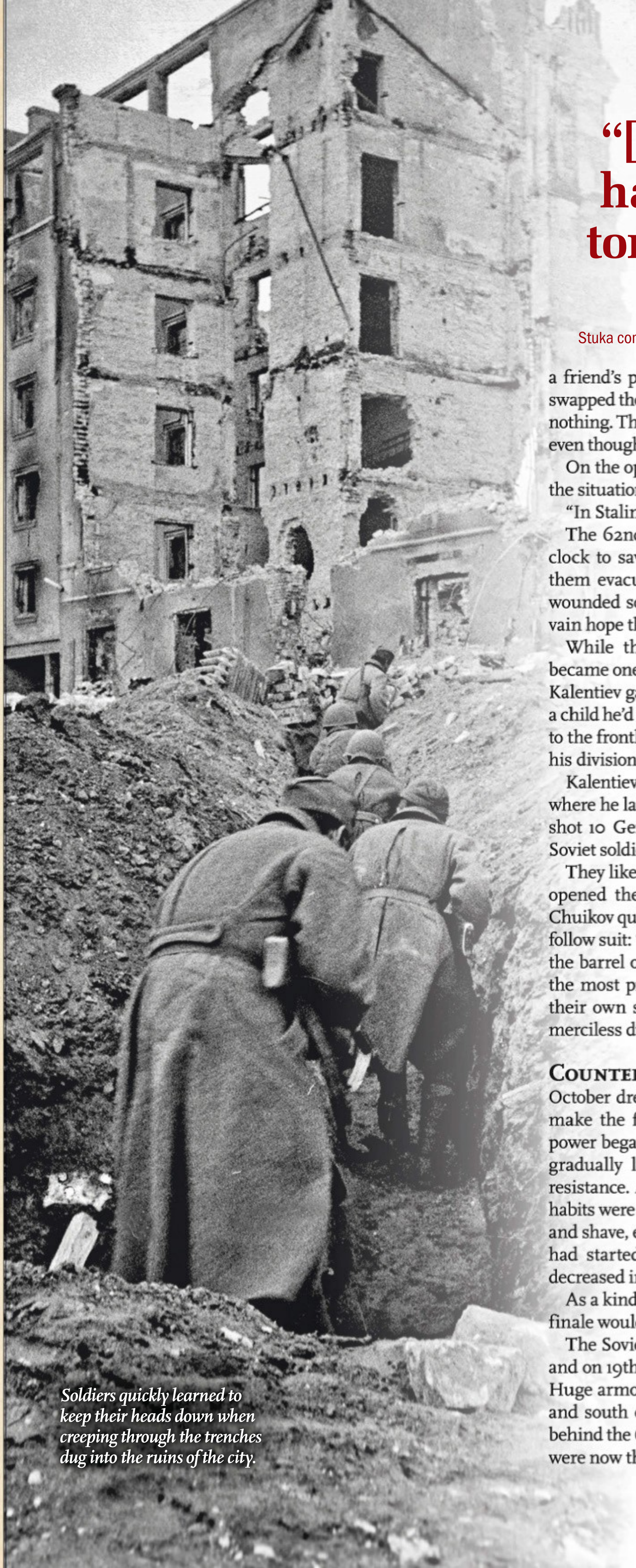
The Germans were advancing towards his headquarters, and he called his younger brother, who was serving on his staff: "Feodor, one of us has to get out of here alive. When the Germans break through I will take my machine gun and make a last stand at the Volga's edge. I'm not going to surrender to them – I will die fighting," the general said. He gave his brother a farewell letter to his wife, Valentina, and sent him to safety on the Volga's east bank.

Then Chuikov ordered a gun battery to destroy his headquarters should the Germans manage to overrun it.

Humour kept spirits up

Along the river, soldiers in the Soviet bunkers and trenches lived in the moment – their average life span was so short that nobody thought about tomorrow. Divisions containing thousands of men were often reduced to just a few hundred within a few days of fighting.

Small rituals sprang up among the condemned soldiers. One would point to one of his pockets, point to



Soldiers quickly learned to keep their heads down when creeping through the trenches dug into the ruins of the city.

“[It was] as if we had dropped toy torpedoes instead of bombs”

Stuka commander Hozzel on the German bombers’ ineffectiveness

a friend’s pocket and say, “Swap without looking!” Soldiers swapped the contents: they might get a watch or cigarettes – or nothing. These kinds of games helped keep soldiers’ spirits up, even though their lives might be measured in minutes.

On the opposite side of the front line, Hofmann described the situation perfectly for all combatants:

“In Stalingrad, anyone can die at any moment.”

The 62nd Army’s doctors and nurses battled around the clock to save wounded soldiers, but had difficulty getting them evacuated to the east bank. In some cases, severely wounded soldiers were sent down the Volga on rafts in the vain hope that others would take care of them.

While the battle continued through October, snipers became one of the Soviets’ main weapons. Soldier Alexander Kalentiev gained permission to go into battle on his own. As a child he’d been a capable shooter, and now he planned to “go to the frontline with my rifle and hunt for Fritzes”, as he told his division’s newspaper.

Kalentiev found good observation posts among the ruins, where he laid patiently in wait, and within a few days he had shot 10 Germans. His account spread and inspired other Soviet soldiers to follow him.

They likened their actions to a bank account – and snipers opened their account “of revenge” by killing a German. Chuikov quickly saw the potential and encouraged his men to follow suit: “It will make every German feel he is living under the barrel of a gun.” The army newspaper regularly saluted the most proficient snipers, while the Germans employed their own sharpshooters, and the hidden snipers fought a merciless duel among the ruins.

Counteroffensive broke the Germans

October drew to a close without the Germans managing to make the final breakthrough, and the mental balance of power began to tilt. The weary soldiers in Paulus’ 6th Army gradually lost the belief that they would crush the last resistance. A Soviet officer noted how the German soldiers’ habits were changing. Previously they had made sure to wash and shave, even when fighting was the hardest, but now they had started to look dirty and broken. Their attacks also decreased in strength.

As a kind of apathetic calm fell over Stalingrad, the battle’s finale would be fought outside the city.

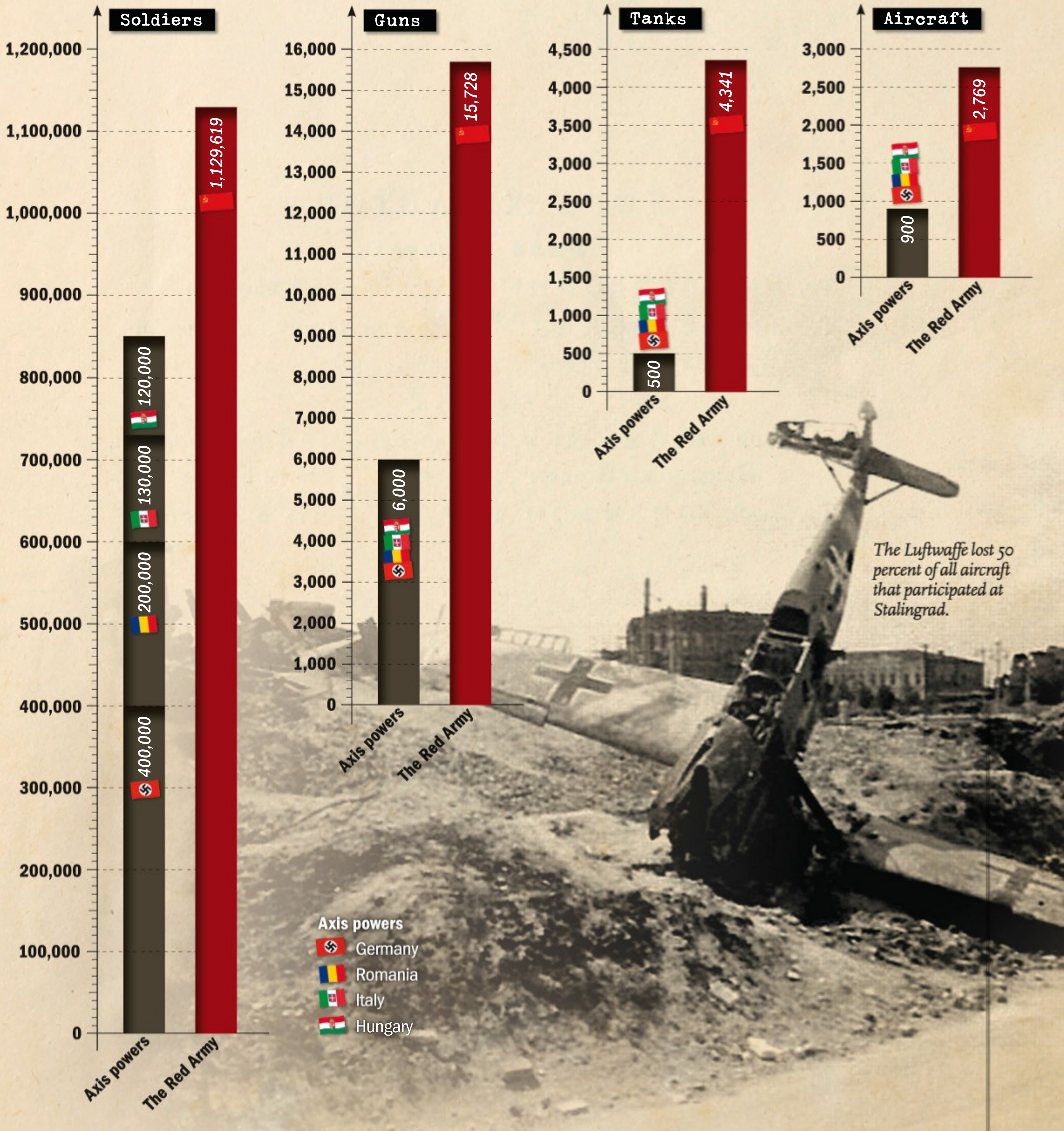
The Soviet army had collected a reserve of a million men, and on 19th November 1942 they threw themselves forward. Huge armoured forces broke through the front to the north and south of Stalingrad, and after a few days they met up behind the 6th Army. The hitherto mighty German besiegers were now the besieged.

Losses broke the German Army

The Red Army bore the greater cost for its defence of Stalingrad. But Stalin had abundant reserves of fresh troops and new equipment. Hitler's losses were crushing because the Germans were unable to bring in reinforcements. The defeat at Stalingrad ended his dream of occupying the Soviet Union.

The Axis forces in Stalingrad were an alliance of four countries: Germany, Romania, Hungary and Italy. Around half of those killed were Germans. In addition to their soldiers, the Axis also lost guns, tanks, vehicles, small arms and ammunition. Another serious blow was the consumption of fuel, particularly for those aircraft that took part in the vain attempt to capture the city.

Total losses at Stalingrad

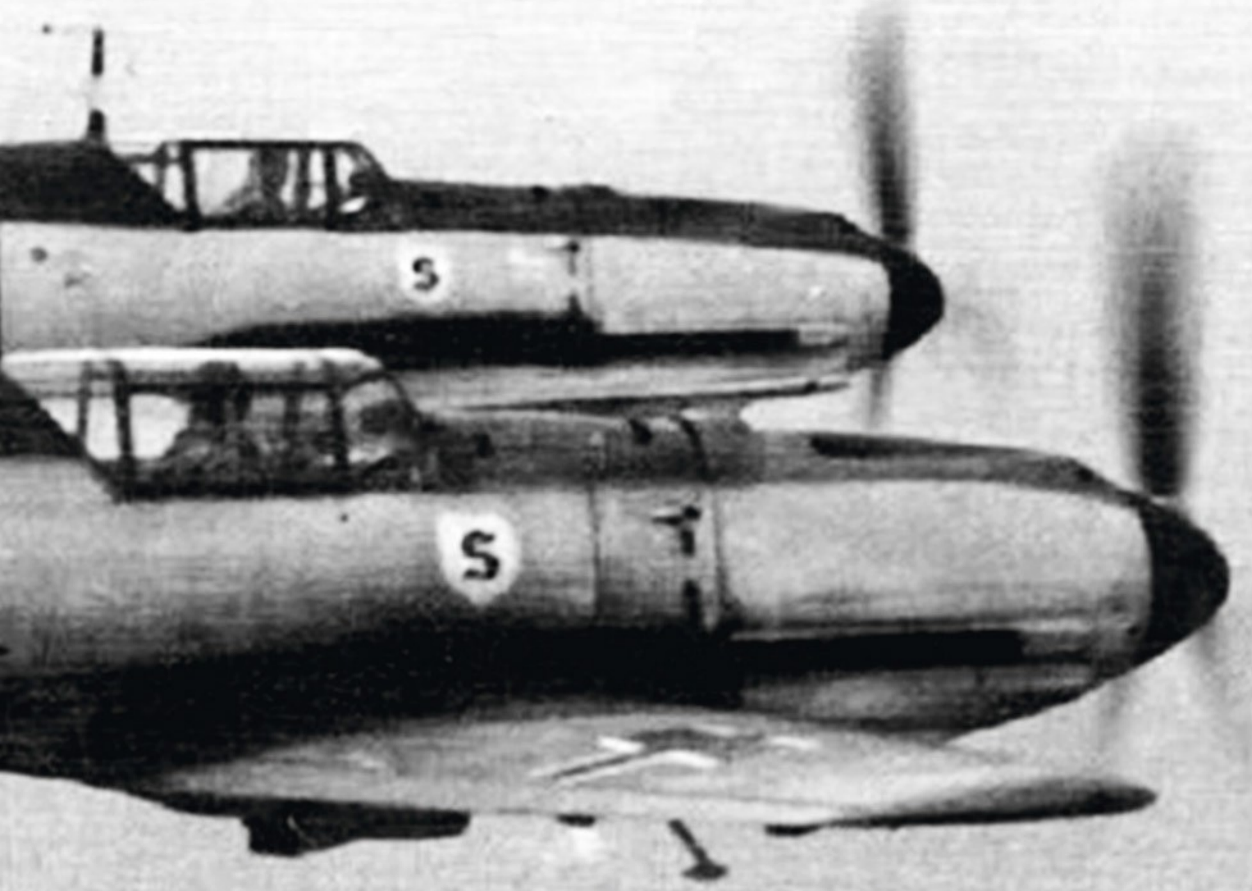


The Luftwaffe lost 50 percent of all aircraft that participated at Stalingrad.

The Battle of Britain in 1940 was a serious defeat for the Luftwaffe, but Messerschmitt pilots scored victory after victory on the Eastern Front.

1942

10TH DECEMBER



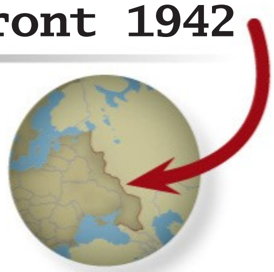
LUFTWAFFE

FIGHTER PILOTS SPREAD DEATH IN THE EAST

Jagdgeschwader 52 was the most successful fighter wing in history. With deadly efficiency, the pilots destroyed over 10,000 Soviet aircraft before Stalin could see them off. Even then, it took huge numbers of Soviet aircraft to overcome the Luftwaffe pilots' quality and experience.

Eastern Front 1942

THE STAGE IS SET

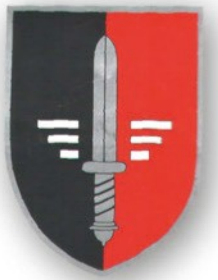


In all the major battles on the Eastern Front, the Luftwaffe provides crucial air support to the Blitzkrieg's panzer armies. Stalin's inadequate aircraft and poorly trained pilots are no match for Germany's ace flyers, but the Soviets just keep sending men and planes to the front in ever-greater numbers.

On the tenth of December 1942, Jagdgeschwader 52 (JG 52) fighter wing's tally of victories in combat reached 4,000. The current crop of kills were being harvested near Stalingrad, where JG 52 was supporting the 4th Panzer Army's push for the Caucasus oil fields. The tally that day included all the wing's successes since the start of the war.

The count had begun three years earlier when Luftwaffe pilot Paul Gutbrod was conducting a routine patrol flight in his Messerschmitt Bf 109. Suddenly, a Mureaux aircraft appeared on the horizon. The lone French reconnaissance plane was circling a bridge across the Rhine, when Gutbrod banked his Messerschmitt towards it. The French pilot turned the Mureaux west, but he was too late: Gutbrod caught the slower machine and destroyed it with a burst of gunfire.

The reconnaissance plane crashed to the ground and Gutbrod returned to a hero's reception at Böblingen air base. The Luftwaffe had won its first victory on the Western Front and Gutbrod was rewarded with an Iron Cross (2nd class).



Jagdgeschwader 52's shield-shaped crest has a sword with wings.

Eastern Front offered easy prey

The brief dogfight on 6th September 1939 was JG 52's first victory. Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring, the supreme commander of the Luftwaffe, had spent recent years overseeing a vigorous reconstruction of the German air force, and in 1939, JG 52 was one of a total of nine fighter wings, each consisting of well over 100 aircraft and

> "One squadron shot down 93 aircraft in two weeks"

JG 52 switched bases over 400 times on the Eastern Front. Fields were quickly transformed into airfields with runways and barracks then abandoned again, often after a few days.

staffed with well-motivated and highly trained pilots. Although many of the pilots were young, they had already gained combat experience during the Spanish Civil War.

In the first year of WWII, JG 52 operated on the Western Front, taking part in the Battle of Britain, but it had limited success. It was only when, in the summer of 1941, the fighter wing moved east to support Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union, that the pilots began to down hundreds of enemy aircraft. The airspace over the Soviet Union became an all-you-can-shoot buffet for the German pilots.

At this point, the Luftwaffe's Messerschmitt fighters were superior to their Soviet counterparts in speed and manoeuvrability, and at the same time, the Soviet pilots had little experience. It was a recipe that couldn't help but result in a platter of success for the Germans, such as the victories they chalked up during May 1942 in the Battle of the Kerch Peninsula. There, one squadron shot down 93 aircraft in two weeks without losing a single plane.

Hartmann's tactics were bold

JG 52 became home to some of the Third Reich's most feared and highly decorated pilots. During World War II, only nine German pilots received the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords and Diamonds. Among them were Hermann Graf and Erich Hartmann. The latter, with 352 victories, became the most successful fighter pilot in history.

Hartmann's tactics were simple but daring: fly close to the target, shoot, then retreat quickly. Often he would only open fire after closing within 20 metres of his target.

NAME **ERICH HARTMANN**

TITLE PILOT IN JAGDGESCHWADER 52

1922-1993

Mum taught him to fly

As a young man, Erich Hartmann was taught to fly gliders by his mother, one of Germany's first female glider pilots. In 1939, Hartmann earned his aircraft pilot's licence, and his successful Luftwaffe career began in 1940. After the war, he spent 10 years in Russian captivity.

- **Flew 1,404 sorties; notched up 352 kills.**
- **Survived being shot down 14 times.**

NAME **GERHARD BARKHORN**

TITLE PILOT IN JAGDGESCHWADER 52

1919-1983

Car accident took the life of flying hero

Gerhard Barkhorn was admitted to the Luftwaffe in 1937 and selected for fighter pilot training at the start of the war. In 1945, Barkhorn was captured by Allied troops, but released soon afterwards. Barkhorn continued his career as a pilot until his retirement in 1975. He was killed in a car crash in 1983.

- **Flew 1,104 trips; notched up 301 kills.**
- **Survived being shot down nine times.**

NAME **GÜNTHER RALL**

TITLE PILOT IN JAGDGESCHWADER 52

1918-2009

German helped train British pilots

Günther Rall began his military career as an infantry officer in 1936, but was later transferred to the Luftwaffe. By 1938, he was a fighter pilot and a lieutenant. Rall was a prisoner of war in Britain, where he participated in an RAF programme that sought to pass on German pilots' skills. He returned to Germany in 1953.

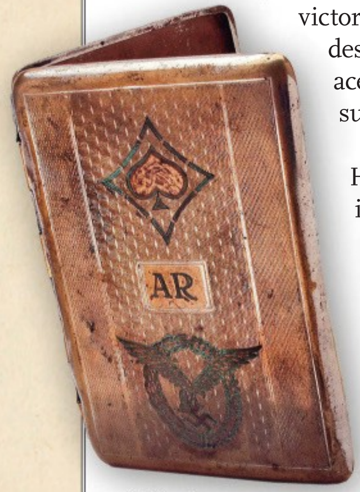
- **Flew 621 trips; notched up 272 kills.**
- **Survived being shot down eight times.**

Luftwaffe fighter pilots sneaked up on their enemies, often striking before their opponent had even recognised the danger. The pilots perceived themselves as hunters stalking prey, and, unlike Soviet pilots, in each case they assessed whether to attack or avoid combat.

Many of his enemies – who referred to him as the Black Devil – never saw him coming as he pushed his Messerschmitt to the extreme and swooped down on them like a bird of prey.

Skill, daring and cool disdain characterised many of the pilots in the fighter wing that became the most victorious flying unit in the war. Hartmann described one of his encounters with German ace Walter Krupinski, aka The Count, who survived the war with 177 victories.

In the spring of 1943, Krupinski became Hartmann's new commanding officer, and immediately demonstrated how he thought the war should be fought. He crash-landed at the base, then, according to Hartmann, "came in, introduced himself, demanded another plane, went up, was shot down, scored a victory and was brought back by car. He then took another plane, scored two kills, and returned, then wanted dinner. The whole event was treated as casually as a card game."



This cigarette case bears both the Luftwaffe's eagle and JG 53's crest – the ace of spades.

Even the way he had crash-landed at the base initially was spectacular according to Hartmann who described how Krupinski's Messerschmitt exploded shortly after landing. Everyone thought they'd seen the last of The Count when he suddenly stepped out of the smoke. His uniform was singed, but he was otherwise unscathed. He simply smiled and complained about the Soviet flak above the Caucasus.

PATIENCE PAYS OFF

Pilots like Erich Hartmann and Walter Krupinski were able to easily assess what type of enemy they were up against. Soviet pilots who opened fire before they were in effective range were easy to destroy; skilled opponents were patient and waited for the opportune moment.

Pilots couldn't hear enemy planes approaching due to the noise of their own engines, and experienced flyers often hid in the clouds or flew towards the enemy with the sun directly behind them, a tactic that meant their opponent couldn't see them because of the sun's glare.

Many German pilots marked the number of kills they'd made with a series of white lines on the tail of their Messerschmitt fighters.

In desperation, some Soviet pilots deliberately flew into enemy aircraft, hoping that they themselves would survive the resulting crash landing unscathed. But the manoeuvre often cost both pilots their lives. Strategically, it made sense for the Soviets to sacrifice their aircraft if they could take out an equal number of the technically superior German planes. However, German pilots were loath to crash behind enemy lines. Most of their skilled pilots had experience of emergency landings, but if a pilot fell into the hands of the Soviets, he would almost certainly disappear without a trace.

Chief mechanic tried to save his friend

By 20th April 1943, JG 52 had notched up 5,000 kills, but while the pilots received all the glory, they were completely dependent on their ground crews, and it was a firm tradition that the chief mechanic always greeted a returning pilot.

Erich Hartmann and his chief mechanic, Heinz Mertens, became such good friends that when Hartmann was forced to land behind enemy lines in August 1943, Mertens grabbed a rifle and water canteen and set out on his own to rescue him. Soviet soldiers found Hartmann first. Realising there was no chance of escape, the pilot feigned injury and was placed in the back of a truck with just a single guard. When a fortuitous attack by German Stuka dive bombers provided a distraction, the flying ace overpowered the guard, escaped from the truck and fled into a field of tall sunflowers. Both Hartmann and Mertens returned safely from behind Soviet lines and were reunited at a grand 'birthday party' – the term given to those gatherings held to celebrate a pilot's survival against the odds. JG 52 held a lot of birthday parties.

Germany's luck turned

But by the winter of 1943, the war had turned against the Germans, who had just lost the Battle of Stalingrad and were in full retreat. JG 52 was beginning to suffer, too. Between April and June 1943, the fighter wing lost 23 pilots. Training was cut back due to a shortage of time and fuel, and all at a time when the Soviet air force's resistance was increasing.

The pilots flew five sorties a day, and only stopped when they were killed or injured. But no matter how many aircraft they shot down, there were always more to replace them. By autumn 1943, JG 52 was the only full fighter wing left on the Eastern Front and German aircraft were outnumbered 20 to 1. The Luftwaffe pilots continued to massacre their opponents, however, reaching 8,000 kills in December 1943.

One of the main targets of JG 52 was the Soviets' powerful Ilyushin Il-2 ground-attack aircraft – known

LUFTWAFFE

PILOTS LED THE WAY FOR THE ARMY'S ADVANCE

1933 Shortly after seizing power, Hitler orders the creation of a German air force. The Luftwaffe is formally formed on 15th May, with World War I fighter pilot **Hermann Göring** as its commander.

This ring has oak leaves on the side and the Luftwaffe eagle emblem.

1936 New aircraft types and tactics – including bombing of civilian populations – are tested in the **Spanish Civil War**. Guernica is flattened.

1939 At the start of the war, Germany has the most modern air force in the world with over **7,000 aircraft**.

1940 **The Battle of Britain** is both Hitler's and the Luftwaffe's first serious defeat. The autumn clashes cost around 2,000 aircraft and more than 3,000 men.

1941 The Luftwaffe plays a key role in the attack on the **Soviet Union.** Over 4,000 aircraft support the invasion.

1942 A project to develop **long-range bombers** capable of attacking the United States is shelved. The Luftwaffe's primary mission remains to support the army.

1943 The strategy shifts from attack to **defence of the Third Reich**. The number of skilled Luftwaffe pilots falls.

1944 The Luftwaffe is strengthened with the **world's first fighter jet**, the Messerschmitt Me 262.

1945 After **unsuccessfully attempting to regain air supremacy** in January 1945, the Luftwaffe effectively ceases to exist as a combat unit.

Luftwaffe boss Hermann Göring was also the commander of Jagdgeschwader 1.

Hermann Göring

> **“Soviet pilots deliberately flew into enemy aircraft”**

as “the flying tank” – which pulverised German panzer divisions and left thousands of burnt-out tanks in its wake. The Soviets built more than 36,000 Ilyushin aircraft. As Stalin remarked, the Red Army needed its Il-2 aircraft “like the air it breathes, like the bread it eats”.

PRESSURE ON PILOTS WAS GROWING

Although JG 52 was doing its utmost to protect Germany’s ground troops, the pilots were fighting a hopeless battle. Every downed Soviet plane was replaced by more new ones. In 1944, Soviet production peaked with over 40,000 aircraft being deployed, and while German aircraft production reached similar levels, their planes were needed on several fronts.

At the same time, the Soviets had begun developing aircraft types that were on par with the Germans’. From 1944, many German pilots deliberately avoided battling the best Soviet fighters, such as the Yak 3, which were faster and had a better rate of climb than the earlier Soviet fighters.

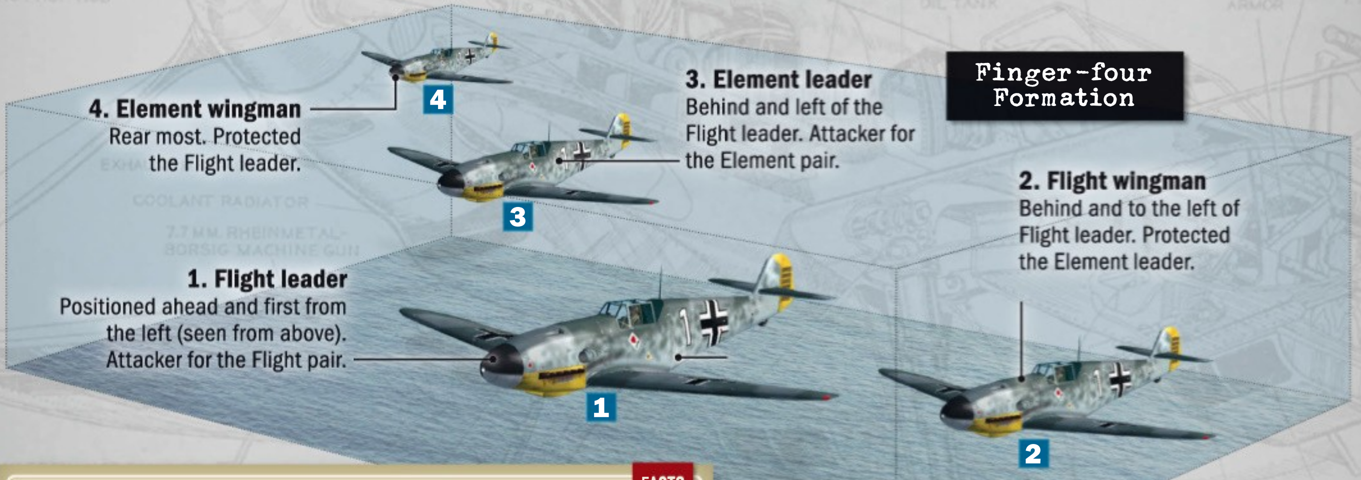
The Soviet advance also put tremendous pressure on JG 52’s air bases. In January 1944, Soviet tanks arrived for a pre-dawn attack on the base near Kropyvnytskyi in Ukraine, destroying eight aircraft before the Red Army was pushed back, and the pilots were able to fly the rest of the planes to safety.

On other occasions, JG 52 would be forced to flee with ground crew packed inside the Messerschmitt fighters’ fuselages. If the mechanics removed the radio, armour plates and other inserts, four people could squeeze into the rear section. JG 52 had to switch its base around 400 times during its time on the Eastern Front. Fields were quickly transformed with runways, tents and makeshift barracks and were then abandoned again, often after just a few days. Bad weather sometimes turned these temporary bases into mud holes,

STRATEGY

Aircraft attacked in pairs

The Luftwaffe’s success was helped by a tactic developed by ace pilot Werner Mölders. Known as the Finger-four Formation, the tactic had several advantages: each of the four planes had good manoeuvring space, could protect one another and could quickly split into two pairs if necessary.



4. Element wingman
Rear most. Protected the Flight leader.

3. Element leader
Behind and left of the Flight leader. Attacker for the Element pair.

2. Flight wingman
Behind and to the left of Flight leader. Protected the Element leader.

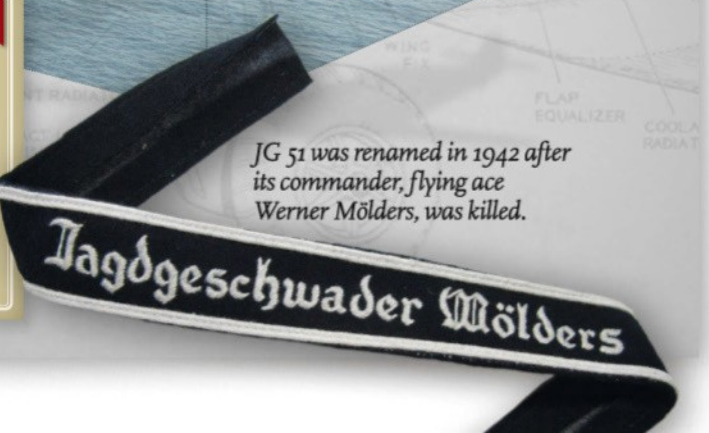
1. Flight leader
Positioned ahead and first from the left (seen from above). Attacker for the Flight pair.

FACTS

GERMANS TOPPED THE CHARTS

A flying ace was a fighter pilot who had shot down or ‘killed’ a number of enemy aircraft in combat.

- The title emerged during World War I and was bestowed on the Red Baron, German pilot Manfred von Richthofen, who downed 80 aircraft.
- Erich Hartmann was WWII’s top fighter pilot with 352 victories.
- German pilots dominated the list of top flying aces. The highest placed non-German was the Finn Ilmari Juutilainen, who achieved 94 kills.



JG 51 was renamed in 1942 after its commander, flying ace Werner Mölders, was killed.

bogging down tankers, and leaving horses to haul the fuel to the Messerschmitt fighters instead. Food and fuel were limited, spare parts for aircraft had to be transported along stretched supply lines, and many of the men were succumbing to illnesses such as pneumonia. In addition, there were nature's uninvited guests: lice and rats. Erich Hartmann described how pilots could hear lice popping when they held their clothes up to an open fire.

The most skilled pilots earned brief respites from their harsh life at the front when they were recalled to Germany to receive military decorations. The awards were made according to a simple point system. Shooting down a single-engine enemy aircraft earned one point, while a downed twin-engine earned two points and so on. On 25th August 1944, Hartmann was presented with the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords and Diamonds by Adolf Hitler at *Wolfsschanze* – The Wolf's Lair – military headquarters in East Prussia. Tightened security following a failed assassination attempt led to security demanding the pilot's sidearm as he was about to be ushered in to see the Führer, but Hartmann refused, stating that he would not receive the award if he was suspected of disloyalty. Hitler's aide relented and Hartmann was permitted to wear his Walther pistol during the ceremony.

Soviet archives proved the success rate

Back on the Eastern front, JG 52 reached 10,000 kills in early September 1944. Germany's ministry of propaganda took full advantage of the success – news of glorious victories at the front were becoming a rarity and the population was becoming demoralised. Joseph Goebbels even composed a special tribute to JG 52 and had it aired on German state radio.

After the war, some historians questioned whether JG 52's phenomenally high kill rate was genuine or had been inflated by German propaganda that celebrated the wing's greatest pilots as folk heroes. But research into the Soviets' recently opened wartime archives confirms the vast majority of the kills with corresponding records of Soviet aircraft shot down by German fighters. It was confirmation that JG 52 was by far the most successful fighter wing of the war.

During the first half of the war, JG 52 's tactics were far ahead of their enemy's, not least their famous Finger-four Formation, in which the planes flew in groups of four, with two pairs covering one another. This configuration provided much greater manoeuvrability than the Allied wedge-shaped formation. As the war progressed, however, the Allies adopted the same tactics.

The pilots in JG 52 flew far more missions than Allied pilots, which also gave the German pilots more combat experience. While Allied pilots had rest periods and took turns to complete missions, the German pilots flew continually until they were either captured or killed.

By autumn 1944, it became increasingly obvious that the end was near. Stalin's troops gradually pushed the Germans back towards the West. The fighter wing

While JG 52 only flew Messerschmitt Bf 109s, their counterparts in JG 51 used both Bf 109s and Focke-Wulf FW 190s.

It was deadly for German pilots to land behind enemy lines. If the pilots survived the landing, there was a high risk of being killed either by Soviet civilians or Red Army soldiers.

Mölders 1941 Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords and Diamonds.

flew above Romania, Hungary, Austria, Poland and then over the Fatherland itself, where eventually they were given the hopeless task of trying to defend Berlin against Allies approaching from both east and west.

Ten years in prison

During the last days of the war, in May 1945, Erich Hartmann and Colonel Hermann Graf, then commander of JG 52, received a final order from Luftwaffe General Hans Seidemann. While the rest of JG 52 was to surrender to the Soviets, Hartmann and Graf must fly to Dortmund and give themselves up to the British. Seidemann didn't want the Soviets to be given the satisfaction of capturing the fighter wing's most decorated pilots, but the pair ignored the order and remained with their comrades instead.

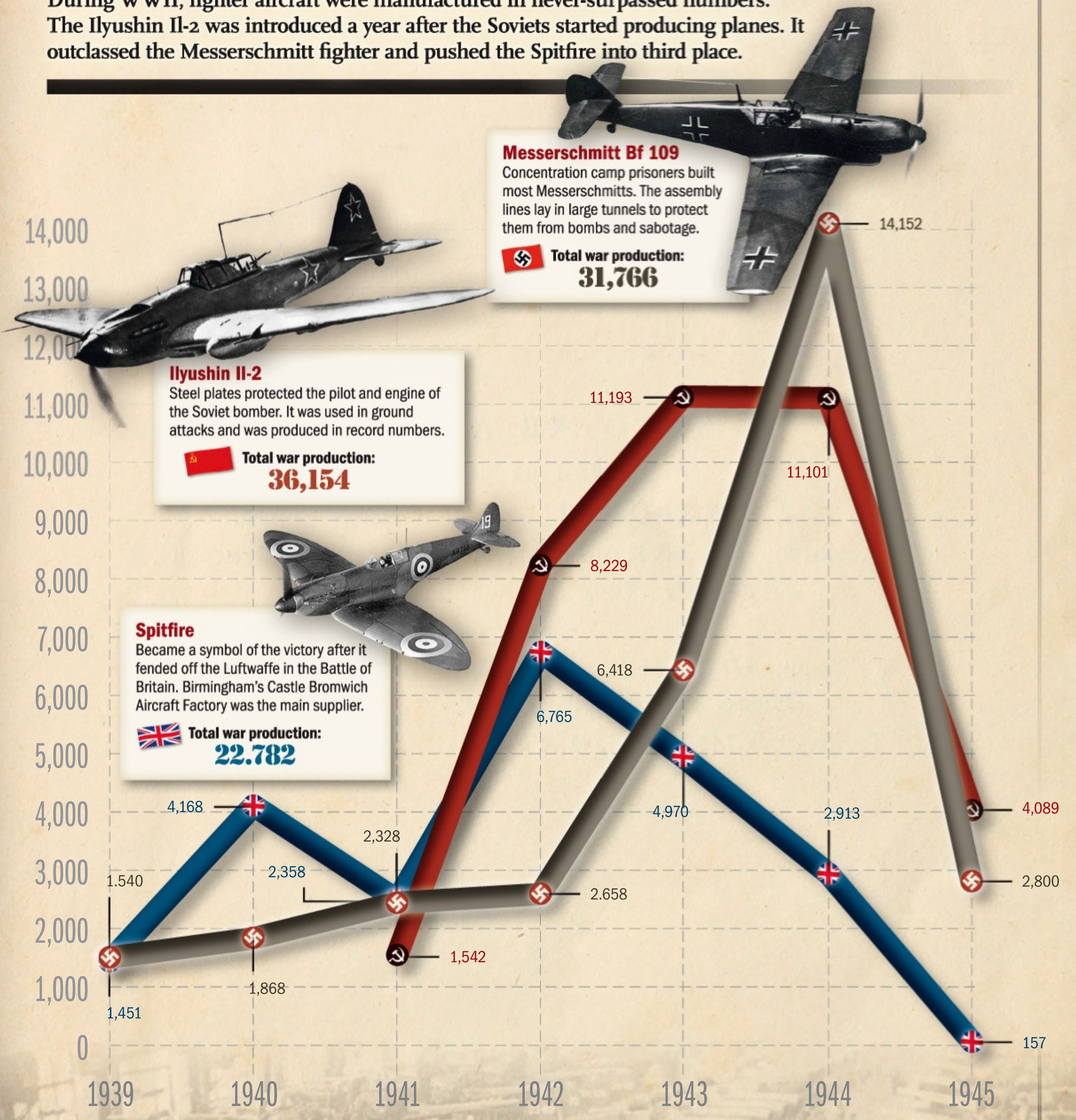
The two men paid a high price for their loyalty. Graf was held in Soviet captivity for five years, while Hartmann was only returned to Germany and his wife, Ursula, in 1955.

The total number of kills made by JG 52 will never be known for sure, as records for the latter part of the war were lost. The Luftwaffe downed around 45,000 Soviet aircraft over the course of the war, with JG 52 probably accounting for around 10,600 of those kills.

> "German pilots were loath to crash behind enemy lines"

Soviets built the most

During WWII, fighter aircraft were manufactured in never-surpassed numbers. The Ilyushin Il-2 was introduced a year after the Soviets started producing planes. It outclassed the Messerschmitt fighter and pushed the Spitfire into third place.



Messerschmitt Bf 109
Concentration camp prisoners built most Messerschmitts. The assembly lines lay in large tunnels to protect them from bombs and sabotage.

Total war production:
31,766

Ilyushin Il-2
Steel plates protected the pilot and engine of the Soviet bomber. It was used in ground attacks and was produced in record numbers.

Total war production:
36,154

Spitfire
Became a symbol of the victory after it fended off the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain. Birmingham's Castle Bromwich Aircraft Factory was the main supplier.

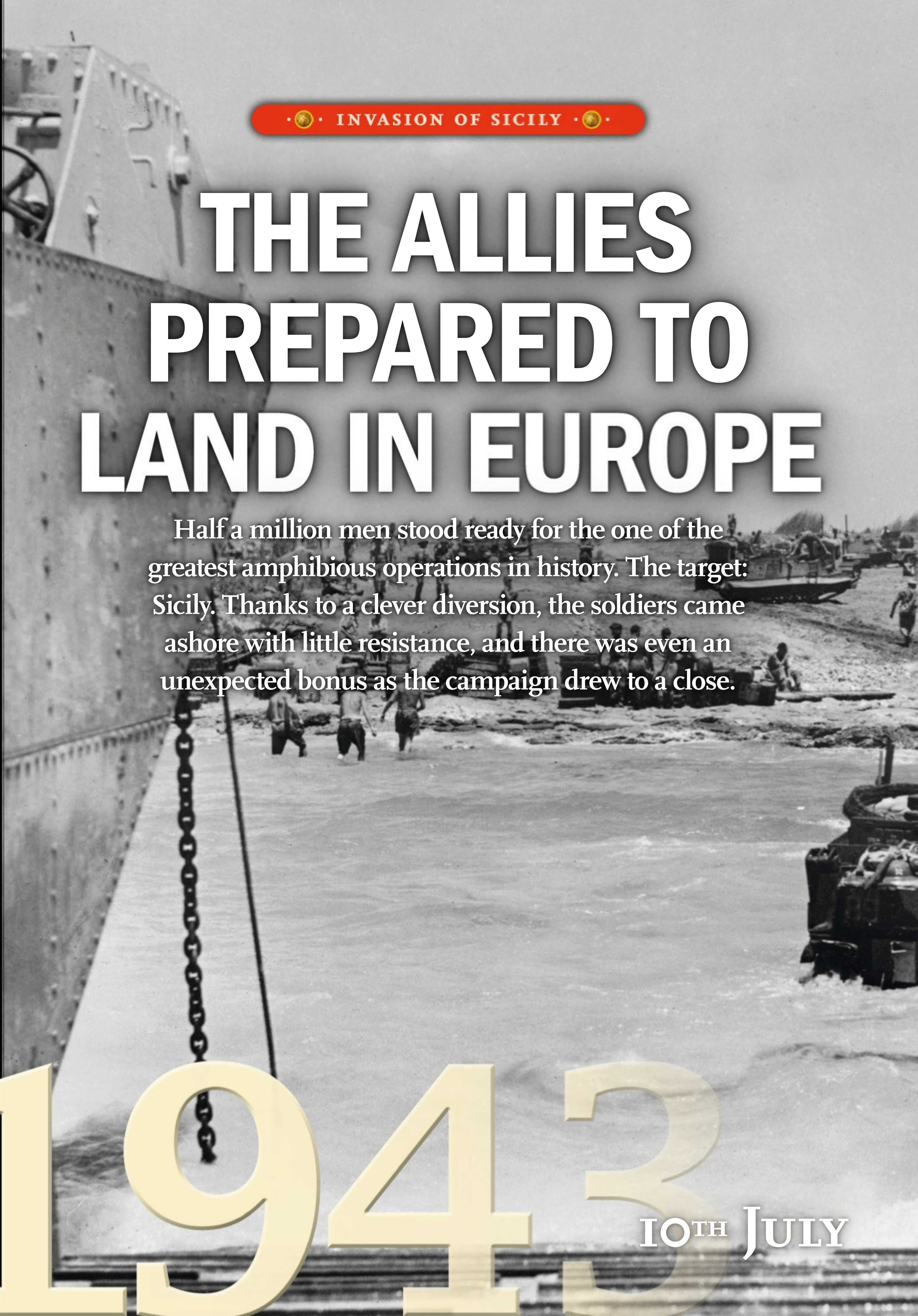
Total war production:
22.782

14,000
13,000
12,000
11,000
10,000
9,000
8,000
7,000
6,000
5,000
4,000
3,000
2,000
1,000
0
1939
1940
1941
1942
1943
1944
1945
14,152
11,193
11,101
8,229
6,418
6,765
4,970
2,913
4,168
2,328
2,358
1.540
2.658
1,542
1,868
1,451
4,089
2,800
157

INVASION OF SICILY

THE ALLIES PREPARED TO LAND IN EUROPE

Half a million men stood ready for the one of the greatest amphibious operations in history. The target: Sicily. Thanks to a clever diversion, the soldiers came ashore with little resistance, and there was even an unexpected bonus as the campaign drew to a close.



1943

10th July

Troops and equipment easily rolled ashore as the enemy had left most invasion beaches undefended.

Sicily 1943

THE STAGE IS SET

Italy
Sicily

The war in North Africa has been won by the Allies, but shipping in the Mediterranean is still under attack from Italian and German bases in Sicily. Britain and the US decide to capture the island to end the attacks and destabilise Italy's fascist regime. Preparations begin to land the largest number of troops in history.

It was 04.30 on the morning of 10th July 1943. Day had yet to break as Bill Cheall crawled down the scrambling net that clung to his ship's side. Thousands of small landing craft awaited the troops, bobbing up and down like corks, but despite the heavy swell caused by strong winds, Cheall was able to board successfully – just: "It was a strange sensation to go to put our foot on something solid and finding it wasn't solid at all, but almost alive," he later recounted.

The 26-year-old British soldier had seen a lot since he'd signed up for the army in 1939. In just four years, Cheall had faced Hitler's forces in both France and Africa, but this was nothing like anything he'd experienced before. As the day dawned, Cheall's boat cut its way towards the coast. Operation Husky, the Allied landing on Sicily, was underway.

The landing was the biggest of the war so far and would be the first time that the Allies had attempted to invade mainland Europe. Commanders were optimistic of success because the Axis forces were on the defensive, having been forced out of North Africa a few months previously. Sicily was the obvious first target of a campaign planning to inflict a final defeat on Hitler's Nazi forces. Prime Minister Winston Churchill had dubbed Sicily Europe's "soft underbelly", believing it a good place to launch the Allies' advance into Europe.

LANDFALL MET ALMOST NO RESISTANCE

The invasion plan, devised by General Dwight D Eisenhower, was simple. British, Canadian and US forces would make a landing across a wide front on the south-eastern coast of the

1890-1969

NAME **DWIGHT D EISENHOWER**

TITLE FIVE-STAR GENERAL

Ike was a late bloomer in the US Army

Although Eisenhower – or Ike, as he'd been called since childhood – ranked third best in his class when he graduated from the prestigious West Point military academy in 1915, the army didn't need him in an active role. While his comrades were sent to Europe to fight in World War I, Ike had to settle for commanding a training camp situated on a battlefield from the Civil War era.

Despite his lack of combat experience, Eisenhower demonstrated fine organisational skills, and gradually worked his way up through the ranks during the interwar period. In 1942, he was put at the head of US forces in Europe and led the campaigns in Africa, Sicily and Italy, as well as being responsible for D-Day.

Originally, Eisenhower had no desire to enter politics but was persuaded by the Republicans and became US president from 1953-1961. After World War II, he ended the Korean War and repeatedly expressed the importance of securing peace by all available means.

- **Raised in the US Midwest with a strong religious background.**
- **Was a keen golf, poker and bridge player.**

island. From here, the British, under the direction of General Bernard 'Monty' Montgomery, would advance north, capturing ports and airfields to facilitate more troop landings. Their ultimate aim was to take the port city of Messina that provided the primary connection to the Italian mainland. Meanwhile the less-experienced US Seventh Army, under the command of Lieutenant General George Patton, was tasked with taking a route further west to protect the British flanks.

The landings were originally supposed to be supported by paratroopers, but the strong winds blew both parachutes and gliders off course. Yet the difficult weather also had its advantages. Both German and Italian commanders decided it was impossible for the Allies to attempt an invasion in such conditions, so the defence forces weren't on a state of alert. It meant the initial invasion force of around 150,000 men and 600 tanks landed in relatively peaceful conditions.

"Everybody was surprised at the lack of opposition… Consequently, we were soon established on dry land, but with very wet legs," Cheall recalled.

Only the central portion of the US invasion force experienced resistance from German armoured forces, even before they'd reached the beach. But when the Allied ships' guns began to thunder, German opposition quickly fell away.

Jack Wallace, a Canadian whose regiments fought under Montgomery, recounted in his diary that when he advanced in the afternoon with his armoured platoon towards a small town, the landscape was scoured for opposition. "We advanced steadily – 200, 300, 500, 800 yards, but there was no sign of the enemy," he wrote. "We approached the objective ready for all hell to break loose until we saw a tiny white flag at the first house. Inside it we found four very poor Sicilian peasants."

The lack of resistance wasn't simply a result of the weather. The Axis powers had a relatively weak presence in Sicily, in part due to the Germans being tricked a few months previously by an ingenious piece of British Intelligence misinformation. Operation Mincemeat had seen the Germans 'discover' a body dressed in military uniform carrying a folder of fake invasion plans. According to the plans, Greece and Sardinia were the main target for the forthcoming invasion, and Hitler had moved troops from Sicily to counter the perceived threat.

Soldiers carry their firearms carefully through the surf to avoid getting them wet.

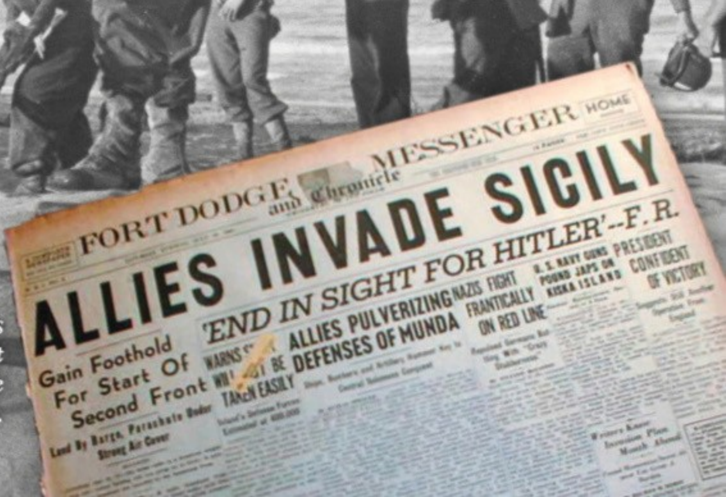
Crucial port was captured

By the end of the invasion's first day, George Patton's Seventh Army had established a beachhead 80 kilometres wide and 3-6 km deep. Along the way, his troops had taken 4,000 prisoners with virtually no losses.

This lack of resistance continued even after the Allies began to march north. Bill Cheall recalled how "the civilians appeared to welcome us, handing us fruit" from the oranges and lemons grown on their farms.

On 12th July, British forces took the port of Augusta on the east coast before heading north. Meanwhile, Patton moved the Seventh Army north-west towards Palermo on the north coast. The Americans advanced swiftly and seized the important port on 22nd July. Once it was occupied, the Allies could land more troops and supplies. While US

US soldiers used their rifle bayonets to prod the sand cautiously for land mines.



FORT DODGE MESSENGER and Chronicle HOME

ALLIES INVADE SICILY

'END IN SIGHT FOR HITLER'--F.R.

Gain Foothold For Start Of Second Front

Land By Barge, Parachute Under Strong Air Cover

ALLIES PULVERIZING DEFENSES OF MUNDA

NAZIS FIGHT FRANTICALLY ON RED LINE

U.S. NAVY GUNS POUND JAPS ON KISKA ISLAND

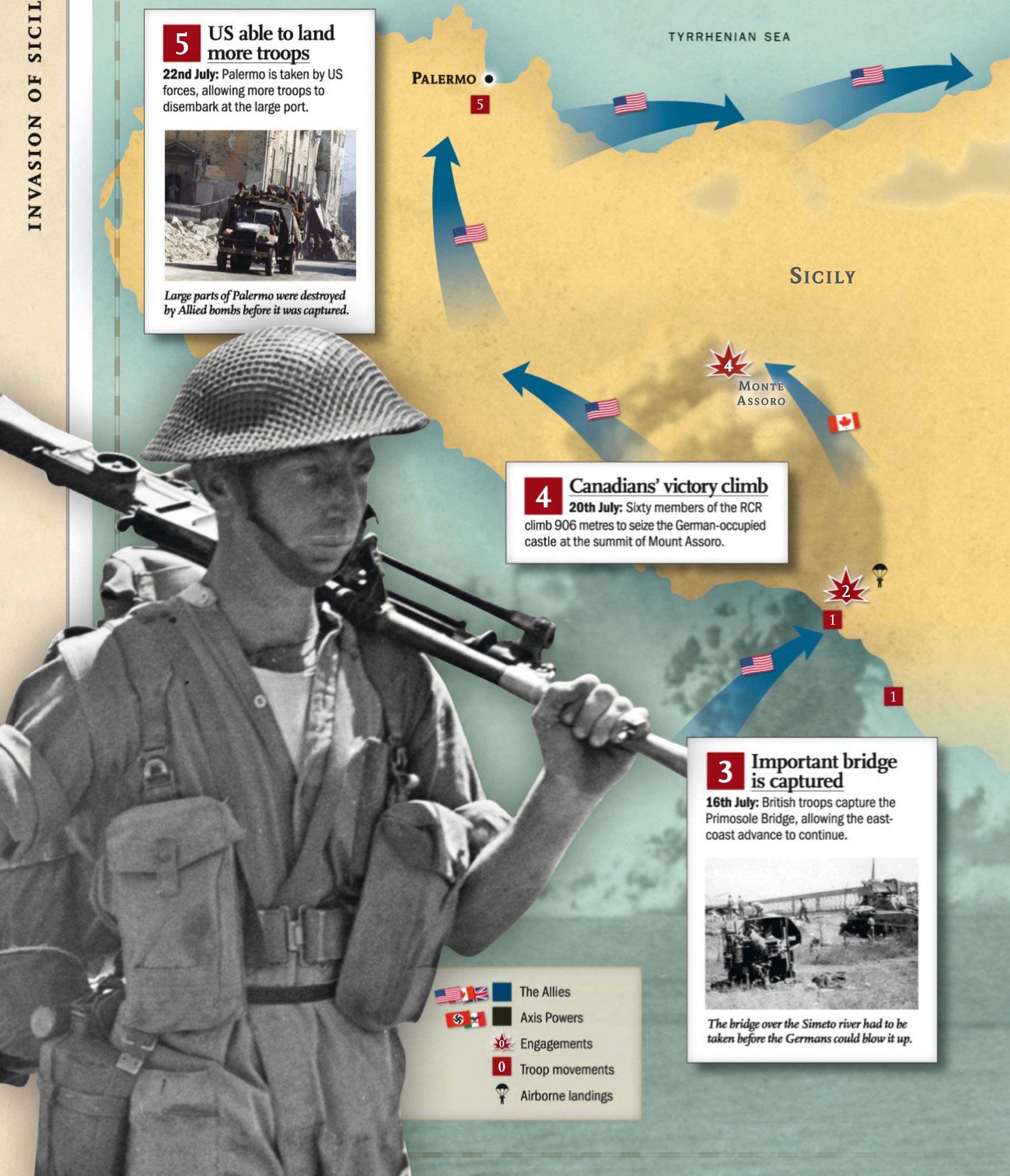
PRESIDENT CONFIDENT OF VICTORY

TAKEN EASILY

News of the first landings in Sicily led to prominent headlines throughout the free world.

How Sicily was overrun

The invasion of Sicily followed a broad plan whereby US forces took the western part of the island, while British soldiers advanced along the east coast.


TYRRHENIAN SEA
PALERMO
5
SICILY
4
MONTE ASSORO
2
1
1
The Allies
Axis Powers
Engagements
Troop movements
Airborne landings

5 US able to land more troops

22nd July: Palermo is taken by US forces, allowing more troops to disembark at the large port.

Large parts of Palermo were destroyed by Allied bombs before it was captured.

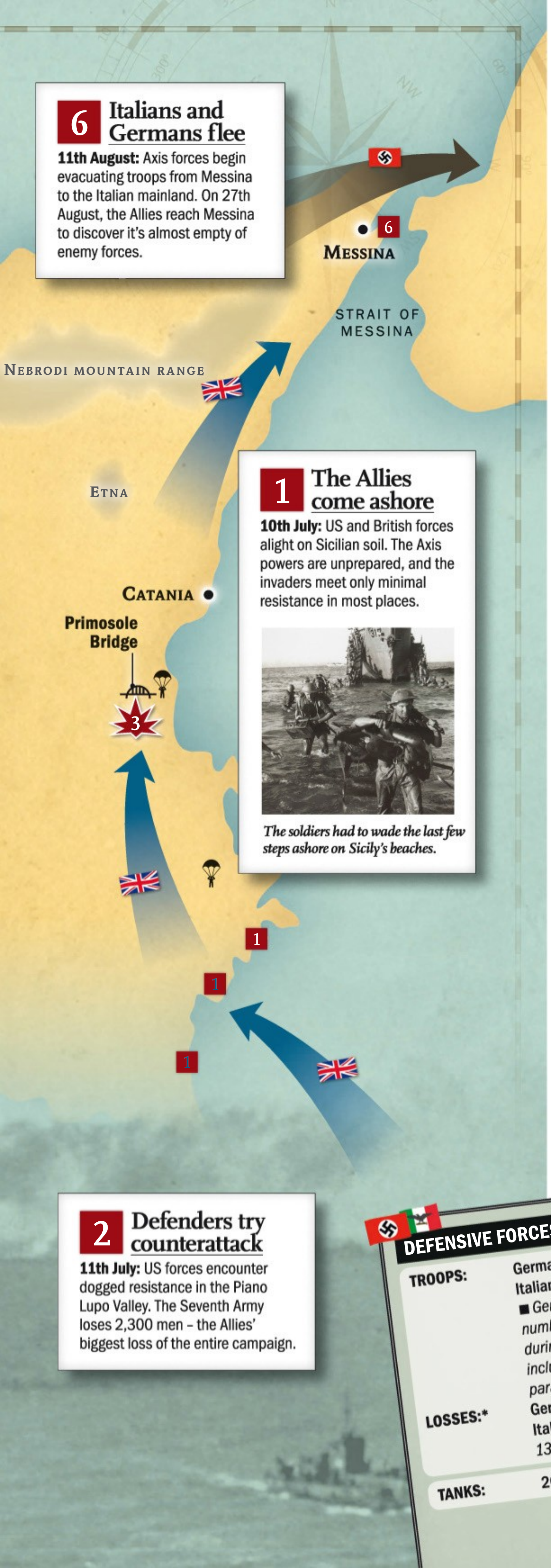
4 Canadians' victory climb

20th July: Sixty members of the RCR climb 906 metres to seize the German-occupied castle at the summit of Mount Assoro.

3 Important bridge is captured

16th July: British troops capture the Primosole Bridge, allowing the east-coast advance to continue.

The bridge over the Simeto river had to be taken before the Germans could blow it up.



6 Italians and Germans flee

11th August: Axis forces begin evacuating troops from Messina to the Italian mainland. On 27th August, the Allies reach Messina to discover it's almost empty of enemy forces.

1 The Allies come ashore

10th July: US and British forces alight on Sicilian soil. The Axis powers are unprepared, and the invaders meet only minimal resistance in most places.

The soldiers had to wade the last few steps ashore on Sicily's beaches.

2 Defenders try counterattack

11th July: US forces encounter dogged resistance in the Piano Lupo Valley. The Seventh Army loses 2,300 men – the Allies' biggest loss of the entire campaign.

Badges for the US Seventh Army and British Eighth Army, both of which were created during the war.

forces enjoyed a surprisingly easy passage, the British eventually encountered serious resistance, not least at the Primosole Bridge, an important crossing over the Simeto river. According to the original plan, it should have been taken by troops from the 1st Parachute Brigade. The intention had been to land soldiers on both sides of the bridge, then hold it until the British Eighth Army arrived. Unfortunately, the aircraft delivering the paratroopers came under heavy fire from the Luftwaffe, and its evasive manoeuvres led to the paratroopers being scattered over a large area.

Cheall, who approached the bridge on 13th July, watched the fighting from a nearby high vantage point.

"At this stage, our 69th Brigade was in a position on the hillsides overlooking Primosole Bridge, although we were actually some distance away looking across the valley through which the river ran," he wrote. "Although not taking part in the actual attack, our battalion was being machine-gunned, shelled and mortared, causing many casualties amongst us."

The bridge wasn't secured until 16th July, allowing Cheall and other Eighth Army soldiers to continue their march north. Only after crossing the bridge did he see how bloody the battle had been: "The whole area around the bridge was littered with dead bodies and all kinds of weapons and equipment."

GERMANS FORTIFIED AN OLD CASTLE

It wasn't just the Germans who made life miserable for the Allies. Sicily's mountainous terrain posed most problems for the Royal Canadian Regiment. Its road to Messina passed over Monte Assoro. At its summit, 906 metres high, lay an old castle that the Germans had fortified and could use to fire on the advancing soldiers. The Canadians would have to take the fortress and destroy the German artillery.

On the west side of the mountain, the village of Assoro clung to the cliff side. The only route through was a road that twisted between the houses and up the mountain. But the Canadians knew that awaiting them would be numerous machine-gun nests. Their only chance of taking the mountain would be to approach from the south side. Here, however, there was only a small path, created over

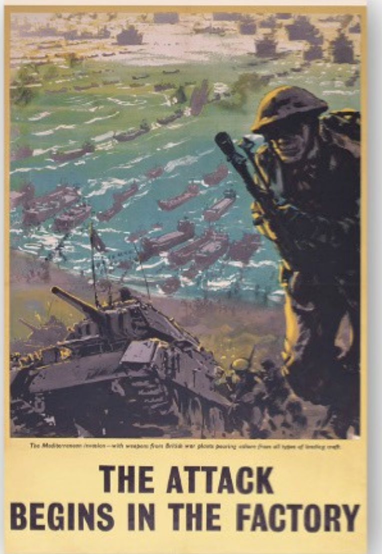
DEFENSIVE FORCES

TROOPS:	German: 30,000 Italian: 230,000 ■ Germans reinforced their numbers to around 60,000 during the campaign, including an additional parachute division.
LOSSES:*	German: 29,000 Italian: 140,000 (of which 137,000 were captured)
TANKS:	260

INVASION FORCES

TROOPS:	150,000 ■ *During the invasion, the Allies reached a strength of 467,000 men.*
LOSSES:*	British/Canadian: 11,800 US: 8,800
TANKS:	600

**Dead, wounded or captured*



The successful campaign was immediately exploited on Allied propaganda posters.

time by goatherds as they'd driven their flocks up and down the mountain.

To evade discovery, the Canadians were forced to advance at night to avoid becoming easy targets for the Germans at the top of the mountain.

The ascent began at 21.30 on 20th July. As silently as possible, 60 men – divided into three companies – started their climb to the top, carrying just weapons, ammunition and canteens of water.

The path was steep and overgrown, so the soldiers only reached the final part of the climb at 04.00. Several centuries earlier, 40 steps had been carved into the cliff, but they had almost worn away and provided little foothold. Cautiously, one by one, the soldiers had to climb the steps while clinging on to bushes and rocky outcrops with their hands. Guns and ammunition had to be passed up to the man in front after he'd climbed. Had a single man fallen, dropped his rifle or even sneezed, it would have been enough to alert the Germans, who could have easily shot the attackers who had no means to hide or flee.

Shortly before dawn, the Canadians reached the top, where they surprised three startled guards. The Germans hadn't even considered the possibility of the Allies ascending from the southern side of the fortress and had only watched the road leading from the village. The Canadians easily overwhelmed the guards and stormed the fortress. By evening, the castle was in Allied hands and the way forward was free.

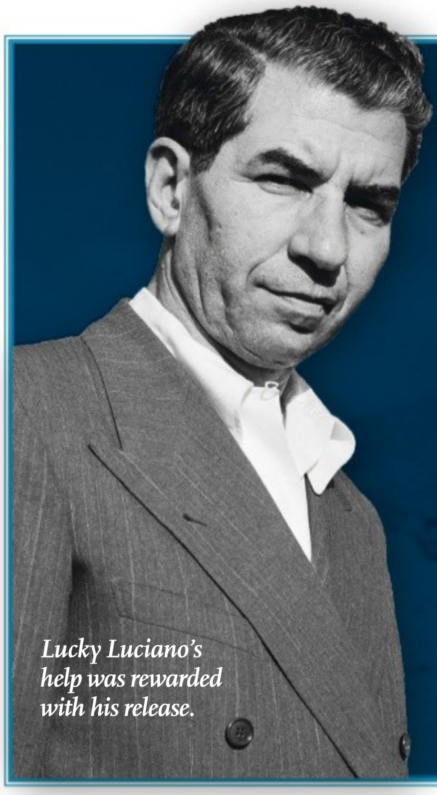
GERMAN DEFENCE COLLAPSED

The advance through Sicily produced a welcome bonus for the Allies when, by the end of July, Italy's fascist regime began to disintegrate. On 24th July, dictator Benito Mussolini resigned, and a new government immediately began negotiations for a ceasefire. At the same time, the Italian army began to withdraw its troops to the mainland. Hitler also gave notice to his generals to plan a withdrawal, but the Führer would not give up so easily, and ordered his troops to fight on while the plans were drawn up. For the rest of the month, the Allies engaged in several skirmishes with German forces, but as the days passed, the Allied forces slowly but surely forced the enemy back to Messina in the north-eastern corner of the island.

The withdrawal sped up when Patton and Montgomery reached the outskirts of Messina – the Germans and Italians managed to evacuate over 100,000 men in addition to large numbers of supplies and ammunition, plus many vehicles across the narrow Strait of Messina. When Patton drove into Messina on 17th August, he was surprised to find no sign of enemy troops. The battle for Sicily had been won, but the Germans had not suffered many losses, and much of their strength remained to defend the mainland.

When the liberation of Sicily was completed, Bill Cheall and his comrades from the 50th Division were billeted in Letojanni, a small seaside town a few kilometres from Messina. Here, the soldiers had the opportunity to both swim and rest. But after a few days, Cheall was sent orders by car to prepare lunch for special guests. When he wrote down his memories many years later, the soldier had forgotten what meal he served – but he never forgot who his lunch guests were: Montgomery and Eisenhower.

The Allies were given an enthusiastic welcome by the island's populace.



Lucky Luciano's help was rewarded with his release.

Mafia paved the way for invasion

Mob bosses hated Mussolini and gladly provided the Allies with intelligence about Sicily, which they knew so well.

As dictator, Mussolini could not accept that any part of the state was beyond his control. Il Duce therefore targeted the Mafia on his ascension to power in 1922. His persecution was so effective that many Mafiosi fled to the United States in 1926-27.

Evidence suggests that US authorities approached Mafia bosses in the United States to obtain their contacts in the old country to help the Allies in connection with the invasion of Sicily. It's believed that the Sicilian Mafia helped to turn public opinion in favour of the US and Allies, as well as contributing crucial intelligence about German and Italian troop movements.

After the war, the top Mafioso Lucky Luciano was released from a New York prison, allegedly in return for his help.

Mussolini was deposed after the invasion

Italian authorities imprisoned the dictator, but Hitler couldn't do without an ally and put his best commando on the case.

Fascist symbols fell out of favour after Mussolini's fall from power in 1943.

In 1943, Italy had been weakened. The country had suffered defeat in both North Africa and on the Eastern Front, and its lack of raw materials – particularly oil and coal – nearly brought industry to a standstill. Italians also lacked food, while at the same time, the presence of German troops was provocative.

These setbacks meant that Benito Mussolini, who had ruled the country with an iron fist since 1922, became increasingly unpopular. In March 1943, many workers went on strike. And with the Allied invasion of Sicily, the Italian army, along with Mussolini's personal authority, was close to collapse. On 24th July, as the Allies advanced across Sicily, Il Duce was given a vote of no confidence by the Grand Council of Fascism. The following day, he was formally deposed in accordance with the constitution by the king, Victor Emmanuel III. As soon as Mussolini left the palace, he was arrested.

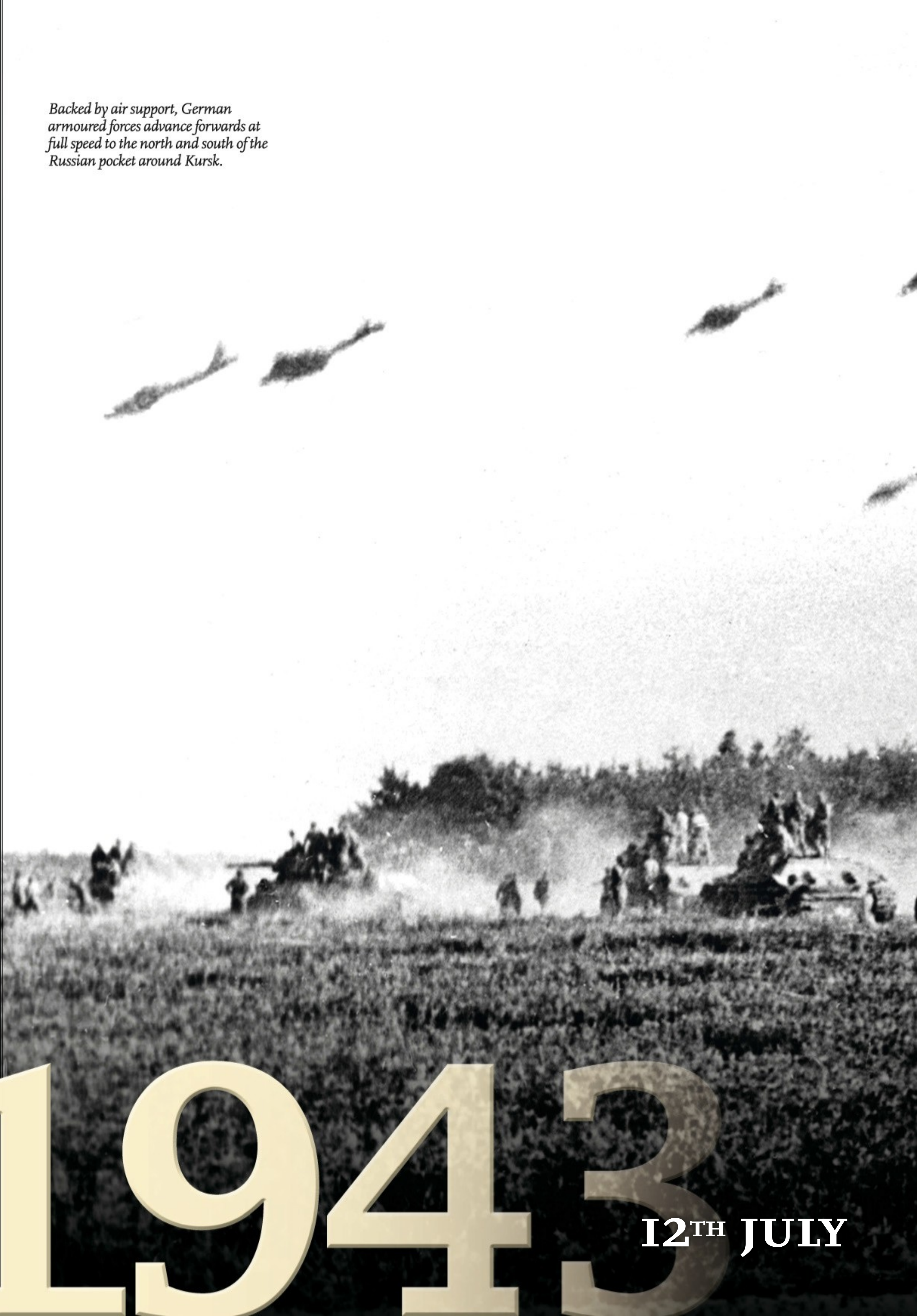
The new interim government feared that the Germans would attempt to free the dictator, so Mussolini was moved around until finally imprisoned in a remote hotel in the Abruzzo region of eastern Italy. Their fears were justified because Hitler refused to abandon his ally. The Führer gave a personal order to launch a rescue operation, which was put in the hands of commando Otto Skorzeny.

Standing over 1.9 metres tall, the sturdily built Skorzeny was one of the Nazis' toughest warriors and specialised in covert operations. He put together a small force that landed at Mussolini's hotel in gliders. The guards were caught so unawares that Skorzeny and his men were able to free the dictator without firing a single shot. Later, Mussolini would be deployed as head of a puppet fascist republic in northern Italy, under the control of the Germans.

As a reward for his efforts, Skorzeny was awarded the Knight's Cross, and even the Allies recognised his abilities. Winston Churchill described him as "the most dangerous man in Europe".

After his liberation, Mussolini flew to Vienna with his rescuer, Otto Skorzeny.

Backed by air support, German armoured forces advance forwards at full speed to the north and south of the Russian pocket around Kursk.

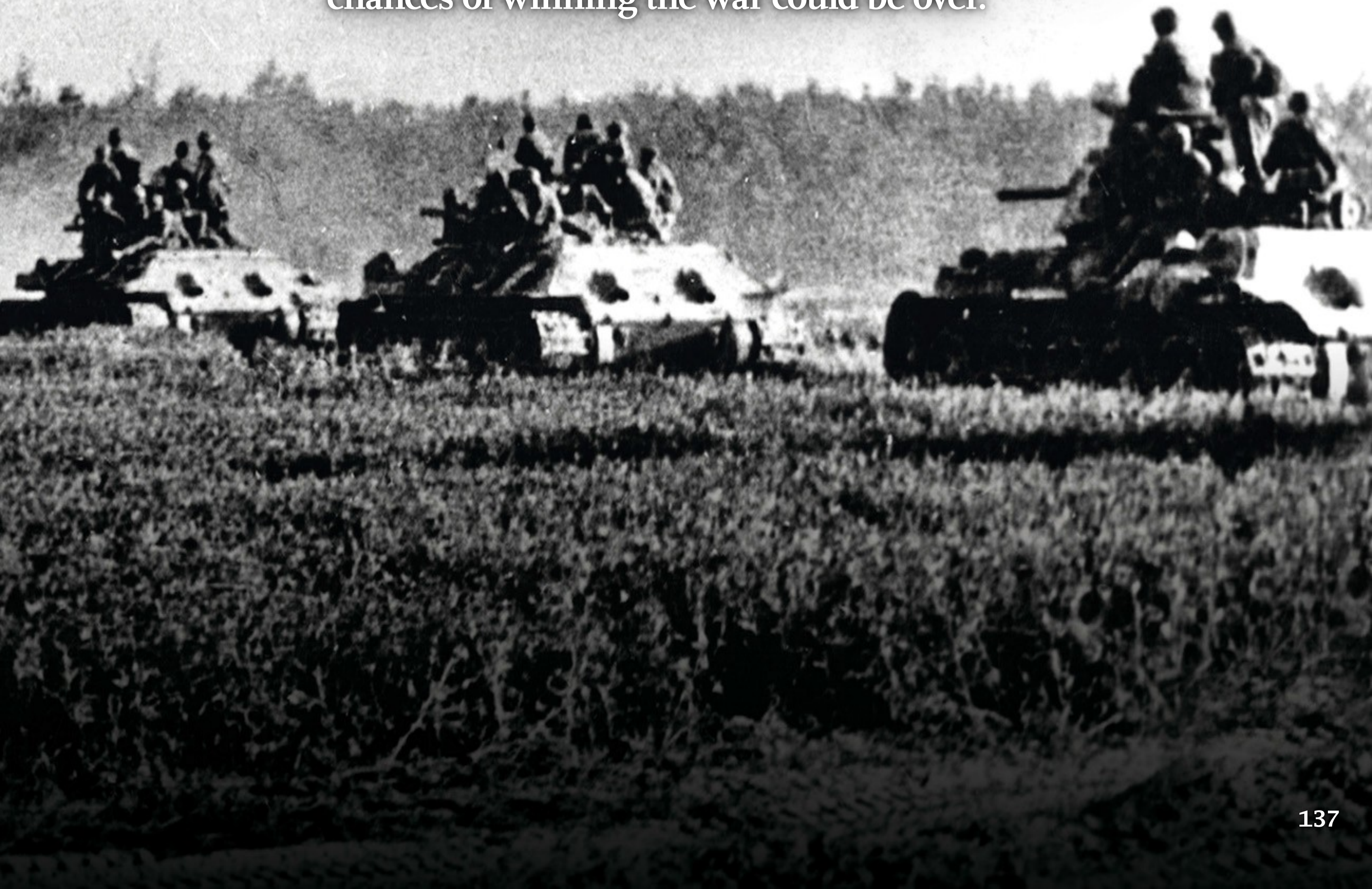


1943

12TH JULY

HISTORY'S BIGGEST-EVER TANK BATTLE

In mid-1943, Hitler attempted to halt the Russian advance on the Eastern Front by committing his forces to a huge tank battle near the Russian city of Kursk. But his generals were worried. If Hitler's major offensive failed, the Third Reich's chances of winning the war could be over.



Eastern Front 1943

Russia
Kursk
Prokhorovka

THE STAGE IS SET

The Wehrmacht has hit a brick wall in Russia in 1943. But now a massive attack against the Red Army at Kursk is planned to regain the initiative. After two years of war, though, the Soviets have learned their lesson. They wait in well-prepared positions when, in July, Hitler directs his armoured forces towards them.

AN ARMOUR-PIERCING SHELL slammed into the side of Captain Erdmann Gabriel's tank and the ammunition store exploded. As flames poured from the vehicle, Gabriel managed to escape and peel off his burning clothes, having the presence of mind to remove his wedding ring before the burns caused his hands to swell. Luckily, the gunner escaped without any facial burns, and the driver and radio operator also tumbled from the tank's escape hatches before the fire consumed them. The gun loader wasn't so lucky, however; he died, trapped inside the burning steel monster.

Captain Gabriel and his crew belonged to Panzergrenadier Division Großdeutschland, which had been formed in the summer of 1943 and was now under fire from Soviet artillery in Nazi Germany's last major offensive on the Eastern Front. Gabriel survived the war and could share his experiences. Many other tank soldiers were not so lucky; they were killed by explosions, flames or shrapnel.

Eyewitnesses recounted burning, smoking and charred bodies hanging from the hatches, while tank crews told of the horrific moment when they realised a shell had struck the tank's armour. A red-hot spot would start to glow on the inside of the tank carriage like an electric hob. If the crew was lucky, the shell would glance off the armour or explode without penetrating it, the red-hot spot fading as the armour cooled, but at other times, the shell would detonate and shatter the armour, hurling deadly splinters into the tank interior.

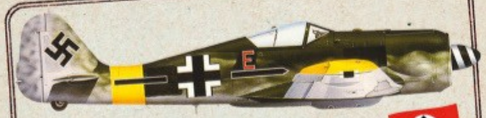
German steel helmets protected against shrapnel but not gunshots.

Großdeutschland was just one of many German divisions that participated in Hitler's last major offensive, Operation Citadel, which targeted the city of Kursk in July 1943. The attack force totalled 800,000 men, 2,500 tanks and mobile artillery, plus 1,800 aircraft. Yet despite the German offensive's strength, it was still up against a much larger foe. At the front around the Russian city, the Red Army numbered 1.3 million men, 3,500 tanks and mobile artillery, plus 3,400 aircraft. In addition, Russian reserve troops were lined up behind them, ready for deployment at short notice. The Germans possessed no reserves, throwing in everything in the hope of regaining the initiative on the Eastern Front with one fierce blow.

Spy revealed German battle plan

The offensive followed what had been a disastrous winter for the Germans in Russia. The 6th Army – comprising 250,000 men – had been surrounded in the city of Stalingrad in southern Russia. Over 150,000 had been killed during the battle, while 91,000 were taken prisoner. After the Battle of Stalingrad, the German armies had been pushed out of southern Russia, and a new front was formed further west, around the border with the Ukraine. The Germans were in retreat.

After the winter setbacks, the Eastern Front now ran in a fairly straight line from Leningrad in the north to the Black Sea in the south. But around Kursk, the Soviet front line had expanded by around 100

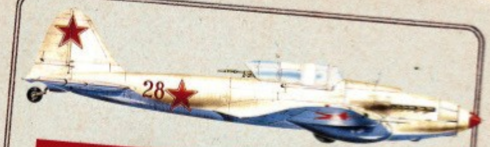


Focke-Wulf Fw 190 A-4

Length	8.8 metres
Wingspan	10.5 metres
Weight (max)	4.4 tonnes
Top speed	605 km/h
Crew	1

GERMAN FIGHTER PAVED THE WAY FOR ARMOURED VEHICLES

The Focke-Wulf Fw 190 A-4 was the Germans' second-best fighter after the Messerschmitt 109. During the Battle of Kursk, a custom-built model took part, built to carry bombs and fitted with metal plates to protect it from enemy fire. The aircraft could therefore be used as a fighter-bomber. When the Germans launched the offensive at Prokhorovka, the Focke-Wulf led the way.



Ilyushin Il-2

Length	11 metres
Wingspan	14.6 metres
Weight (max)	6.4 tonnes
Top speed	404 km/h
Crew	2

SOVIET AIRCRAFT SHOT TANKS WITH MACHINE GUNS

The best Soviet aircraft during the Battle of Kursk was the Ilyushin Il-2. The bullets from its 37-mm machine guns were so strong that they could penetrate a tank's armour and put it out of action by, for example, hitting the engine. The plane carried a two-man crew: a pilot, and a gunner with a machine gun that could shoot down fighters who took up pursuit. The Ilyushin Il-2 was also heavily armoured.

Shells rained down on the German tanks and infantry as they advanced towards Kursk.

kilometres into German-occupied areas. This bulge-shaped area was held by tens of thousands of Soviet soldiers that Hitler planned to cut off. He ordered his generals to carry out a pincer movement, where one German army from the north and another from the south would surround the Soviet troops in the bulge, and pinch it off like a pair of pliers clamping the head of a nail.

Earlier in the war, the Germans had enjoyed great success with lightning attacks and pincer movements. But by 1943, the Red Army was wise to the manoeuvre, so when German troops began to gather in large numbers north and south of the bulge, Soviet generals were prepared for such an attack.

A spy had warned the Soviets about Hitler's summer offensive, code-named Operation Citadel. The Red Army was fully prepared for a defensive battle at Kursk. Soldiers built trenches, laid out minefields and prepared tank traps in the form of deep trenches and hidden gun emplacements. The only thing the Soviets didn't know was exactly when the attack would happen. This was due in part to Hitler repeatedly postponing the offensive's date. His reasons included waiting for arms factories to finish building new types of tanks with thicker armour and more powerful guns.

Hitler also delayed the attack because he was nervous. The Führer was counting on Operation Citadel inflicting a significant defeat on the Soviets that would prevent the Red Army from carrying out any offensive manoeuvres later that summer. It would allow German forces to stabilise the Eastern Front that summer and over the following winter. He would then be able to release forces to counter a possible US and British landing operation in southern or western Europe.

BATTLE OPENED WITH ARTILLERY

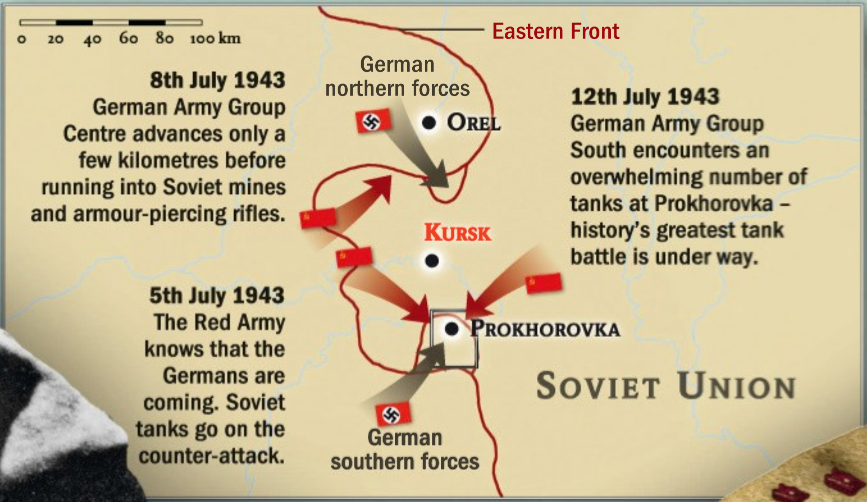
Early in the morning of 5th July 1943, thousands of German guns opened fire to soften Russian defences and pave the way for their attack. The shelling was accompanied by the rumble of hundreds of tanks warming up their

»

> **"T-34 after T-34 rolled over the hill, right into the middle of our infantry positions."**
>
> Hubert Neuzert, German anti-tank soldier

Germans were slowed down

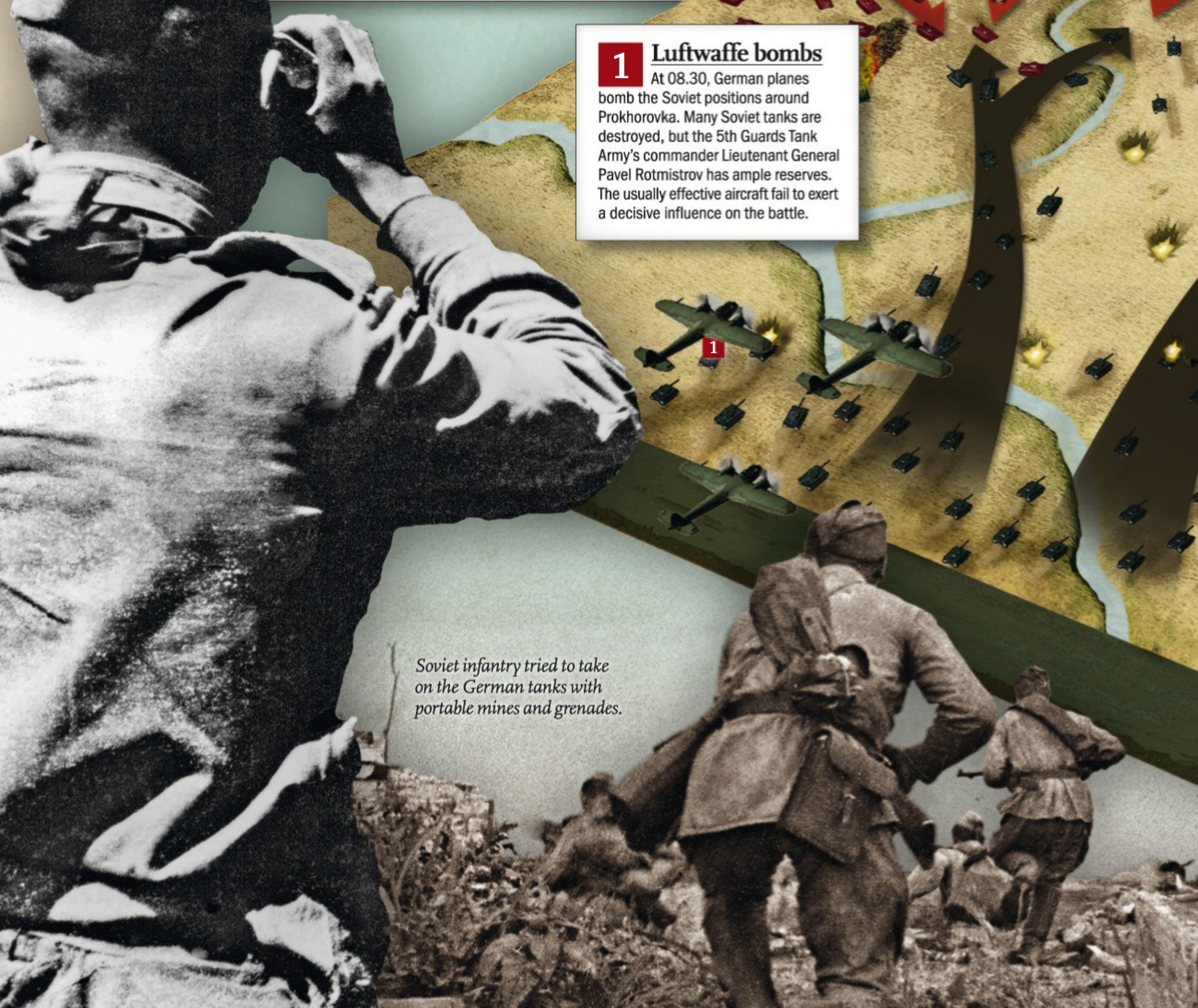
The Germans advanced towards the strategically important railway town of Prokhorovka in 600 tanks, supported by fighters and bombers. But the Russians smelled a rat, and stood ready with 900 tanks and prepared defences. The world's largest tank battle had begun.


0 20 40 60 80 100 km
Eastern Front
German northern forces
Orel
Kursk
Prokhorovka
Soviet Union
German southern forces

8th July 1943
German Army Group Centre advances only a few kilometres before running into Soviet mines and armour-piercing rifles.

5th July 1943
The Red Army knows that the Germans are coming. Soviet tanks go on the counter-attack.

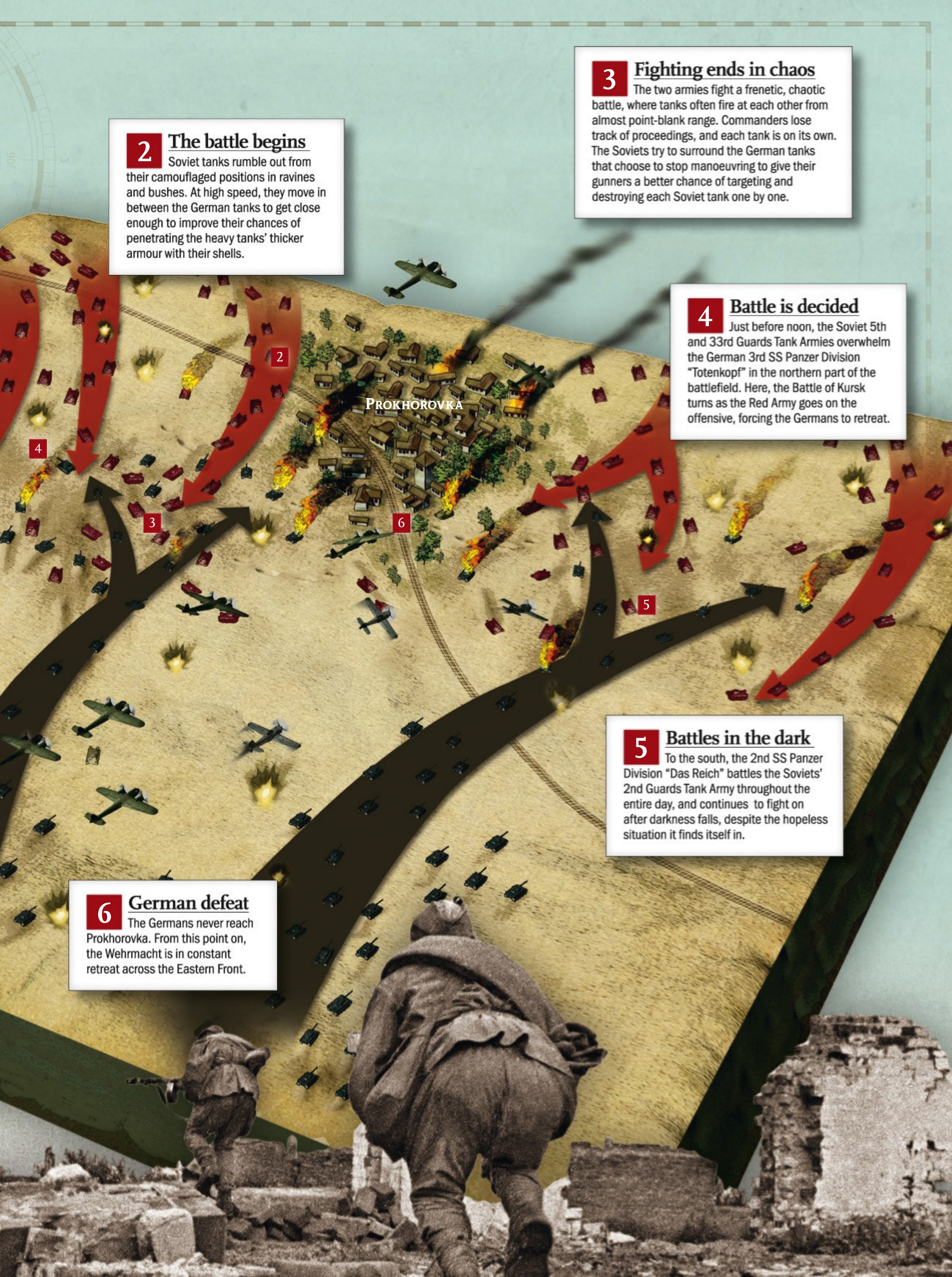
12th July 1943
German Army Group South encounters an overwhelming number of tanks at Prokhorovka – history's greatest tank battle is under way.



1 Luftwaffe bombs

At 08.30, German planes bomb the Soviet positions around Prokhorovka. Many Soviet tanks are destroyed, but the 5th Guards Tank Army's commander Lieutenant General Pavel Rotmistrov has ample reserves. The usually effective aircraft fail to exert a decisive influence on the battle.

Soviet infantry tried to take on the German tanks with portable mines and grenades.



2 The battle begins

Soviet tanks rumble out from their camouflaged positions in ravines and bushes. At high speed, they move in between the German tanks to get close enough to improve their chances of penetrating the heavy tanks' thicker armour with their shells.

3 Fighting ends in chaos

The two armies fight a frenetic, chaotic battle, where tanks often fire at each other from almost point-blank range. Commanders lose track of proceedings, and each tank is on its own. The Soviets try to surround the German tanks that choose to stop manoeuvring to give their gunners a better chance of targeting and destroying each Soviet tank one by one.

4 Battle is decided

Just before noon, the Soviet 5th and 33rd Guards Tank Armies overwhelm the German 3rd SS Panzer Division "Totenkopf" in the northern part of the battlefield. Here, the Battle of Kursk turns as the Red Army goes on the offensive, forcing the Germans to retreat.

5 Battles in the dark

To the south, the 2nd SS Panzer Division "Das Reich" battles the Soviets' 2nd Guards Tank Army throughout the entire day, and continues to fight on after darkness falls, despite the hopeless situation it finds itself in.

6 German defeat

The Germans never reach Prokhorovka. From this point on, the Wehrmacht is in constant retreat across the Eastern Front.

The Red Army had 1.3 million men plus reserves at Kursk, giving it a clear advantage over the Germans, who only had 800,000 soldiers.

engines in preparation for battle. The onslaught did inflict losses on the Soviets, but their artillery behind the front line was firing back, making their own inroads into German ranks. The Red Army was also protected by around one million mines running along its defensive lines, which slowed the German advance from both north and south. As German tanks and armoured personnel carriers crawled forward or ground to a halt in front of the minefields, the Russians could bombard them with large-calibre anti-tank rifles, field guns and grenade launchers.

РАЗГРОМ ФАШИСТСКИХ ВОЙСК ПОД КУРСКОМ

After the Soviets' success at Kursk, medals were produced to commemorate the battle.

When the artillery finally fell silent, the German mine-clearing, infantry and tank units made their move from both north and south. In the north, Army Group Centre's 9th Army under the command of Colonel General Walter Model had to travel 65 kilometres from the front at Orel to Kursk. Model's advance units hit trouble when military engineers were forced to clear the way through the minefields. By the evening, the 9th Army had only managed to advance five kilometres. Model had been cautious: he'd only allowed a limited number of tanks supported by anti-tank soldiers to advance, holding back other forces to test the Soviet lines of defence elsewhere to find their weak points.

To the south, Field Marshal Erich von Manstein did the exact opposite. He let his 700 tanks rumble forward from Belgorod along a broad front, with the infantry at their heels. The tactic provided enough firepower to allow the engineers to clear the minefields faster. Army Group South managed to break through Red Army defences and advance around 20 kilometres behind the line. But von Manstein's forces were still 80 kilometres from Kursk as night fell. One of Army Group South's main objectives on that first day had been to capture a bridge over the Psel river, which stood between them and Kursk. However, Soviet troops had resisted so fiercely that the Germans remained well short of their objective by the time darkness fell.

GERMAN PROPAGANDA KEPT A LOW PROFILE

The next day, a communiqué from the Soviet Information Bureau reported: "This morning, 5th July, our troops in the

> **"Our troops…engaged in heavy fighting with enemy infantry and tank forces"**
>
> Soviet press communiqué, 6th July 1943

Orel-Kursk and Byelgorod directions engaged in heavy fighting with large enemy infantry and tank forces, which, supported by large numbers of aircraft, launched an offensive. All the enemy's attacks have been repulsed with heavy losses, and only in some places have small detachments of Germans succeeded in penetrating our defences to a slight degree."

The German propaganda machine also distributed news about the offensive to the press, but deliberately played down its importance and scope: "From a successful local attack of German infantry in the Belgorod sector and subsequent strong Soviet counter-attacks, fierce fighting on the ground and in the air developed in the course of yesterday which spread as far as the area north of Kursk and up to this hour has been assuming even greater violence."

German propaganda had learned its lesson from the Battle of Stalingrad, where it had trumpeted a German victory prematurely. That time, the battle had ended in a humiliating defeat that exposed the Nazi regime as untrustworthy and deceitful. This time, the propagandists kept open the possibility of writing off the whole battle as a local skirmish across an insignificantly small front. Therefore, very few German civilians knew that a crucial battle was in full swing, and that defeat would seriously weaken the German army in the East. Wehrmacht commanders were fully aware of the battle's importance, however. For example, General Heinz Guderian predicted that if the offensive ended in defeat, the German army would never recover.

Over the following days, the northern army advanced 15 kilometres beyond the original front, while the southern army pushed 35 kilometres in battles where thousands were killed. But the Battle of Kursk was being influenced by events elsewhere. On 10th July, US and British troops landed in southern Italy and engaged Italian and German defences, forcing them to retreat. For the first time during the war, Germany was fighting on two fronts »

1880-1972

NAME **PAUL HAUSSER**

TITLE SS GENERAL

SS general received Knight's Cross

SS General Paul Hausser, who led the German armoured forces at Prokhorovka, received the Knight's Cross for bravery in 1941. A few days after the Battle of Kursk, he added "oak leaves" to the Knight's Cross. Hausser was nicknamed "Papa" because when he joined the SS, he was retired from the Reichswehr, and was then involved in creating the military wing of the Waffen-SS.

- **Participated in WWI and WWII.**
- **Colonel general of Waffen-SS in 1944.**

1901-1982

NAME **PAVEL ROTMISTROV**

TITLE LIEUTENANT GENERAL

Army chief was model Soviet

Lieutenant General Pavel Rotmistrov spearheaded the Red Army's forces at Prokhorovka. He lost hundreds of tanks during the battle, but still ended up being awarded the Soviet Union's highest military order, Hero of the Soviet Union. Later, Rotmistrov fell out of favour temporarily when he lost another large number of tanks in Minsk in mid-1944.

- **Held rank of general until 1968.**
- **Was Secretary of Defence after the war.**

simultaneously. On 11th July, the Soviets went on the offensive. Two hundred kilometres north of the pocket, they spied an opportunity to break through German lines while the majority of German forces were tied up fighting at Kursk. That offensive forced the Germans to divert troops north to block them. Most reinforcements came from Model's army in the north, thus weakening his campaign. The Soviet move achieved its aim, and the northern part of the pincer movement lost momentum until the offensive petered out completely.

PANZER ARMIES ADVANCED TOGETHER

The following day – 12th July – the battle continued unaffected to the south of Kursk. Here, von Manstein and his forces were still trying to break through. That morning, the Luftwaffe bombed Soviet positions around the town of Prokhorovka, a key step towards the operation's target. After the air strike, the II SS Panzer Corps under the command of SS-Gruppenführer Paul Hausser drove forward in a series of wedge formations with Tiger heavy tanks at their head. Tigers were far superior to the standard Soviet T-34 tank in both armour and firepower. A Tiger could hit targets up to 1,500 metres away, while the T-34's range was limited to just 500 metres in turn when it came to disabling Tigers. The II SS Panzer Corps possessed around 80 Tiger tanks. The other 520 tanks were older, lighter models – more comparable to the T-34, making them easier targets.

The surrounding area shook as 600 German tanks rumbled forward through the cornfields and grasslands that covered the hilly terrain outside Prokhorovka. Behind them, thousands of infantry troops followed. The soldiers were instructed to occupy houses and buildings, using hand

TANKS

Two contrasting tanks fought battle

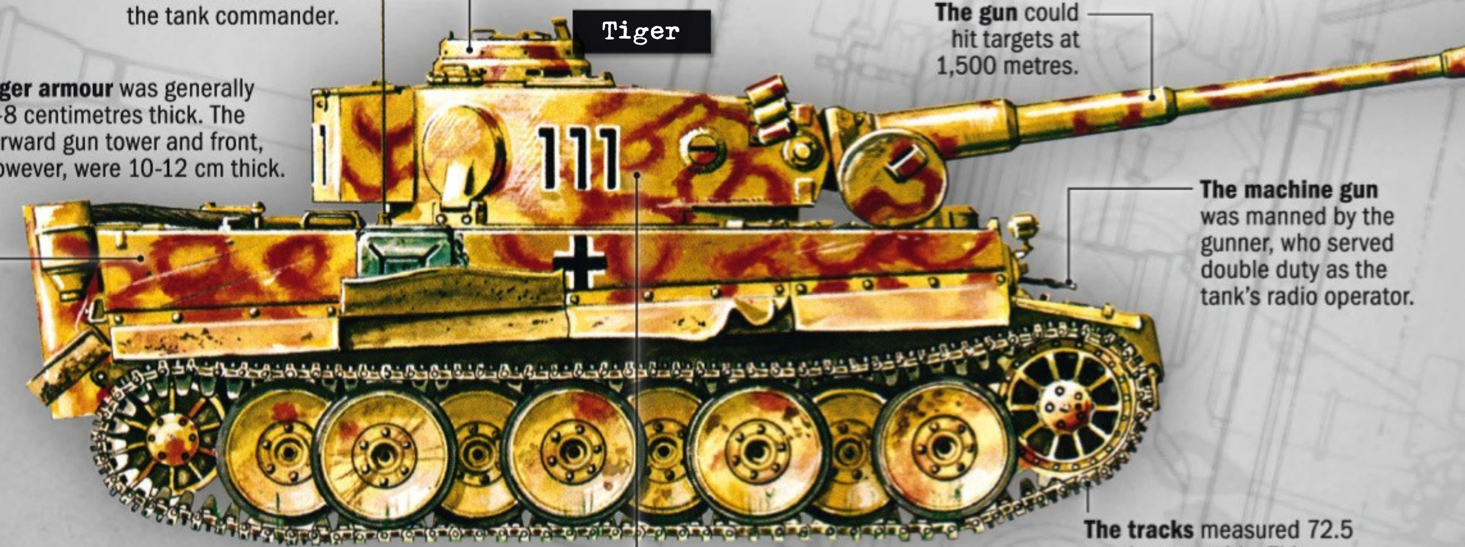
A tank needed to be well armoured, move swiftly, have a gun able to hit faraway targets, and travel a long distance on a single tank of fuel. In the battle of Kursk, two types of tanks played lead roles.

Superb but vulnerable

The Tiger possessed huge firepower and strong armour but was relatively slow and heavy on fuel. Its thick armour was almost impenetrable, and the long gun barrel could fire shells further than the enemy. The Tiger rolled for the first time in 1942 and was feared by the Allies for the rest of the war.

Weight	57 tonnes
Engine	700 hp
Gun	88 mm
Top speed	38 km/h
Range	140 km
Crew	5 men

The Tiger's thick armour provided good protection but its heavy weight often caused it to break down.



Command turret for the tank commander.

Tiger armour was generally 6-8 centimetres thick. The forward gun tower and front, however, were 10-12 cm thick.

The gun could hit targets at 1,500 metres.

The machine gun was manned by the gunner, who served double duty as the tank's radio operator.

The gun turret weighed 11 tonnes and took a full minute to turn 360 degrees.

The tracks measured 72.5 centimetres wide. This ensured that the heavy tank didn't get stuck driving through mud, for example.

WAFFEN-SS OSTFRONT
5.SS-Pz. DIV. WIKING

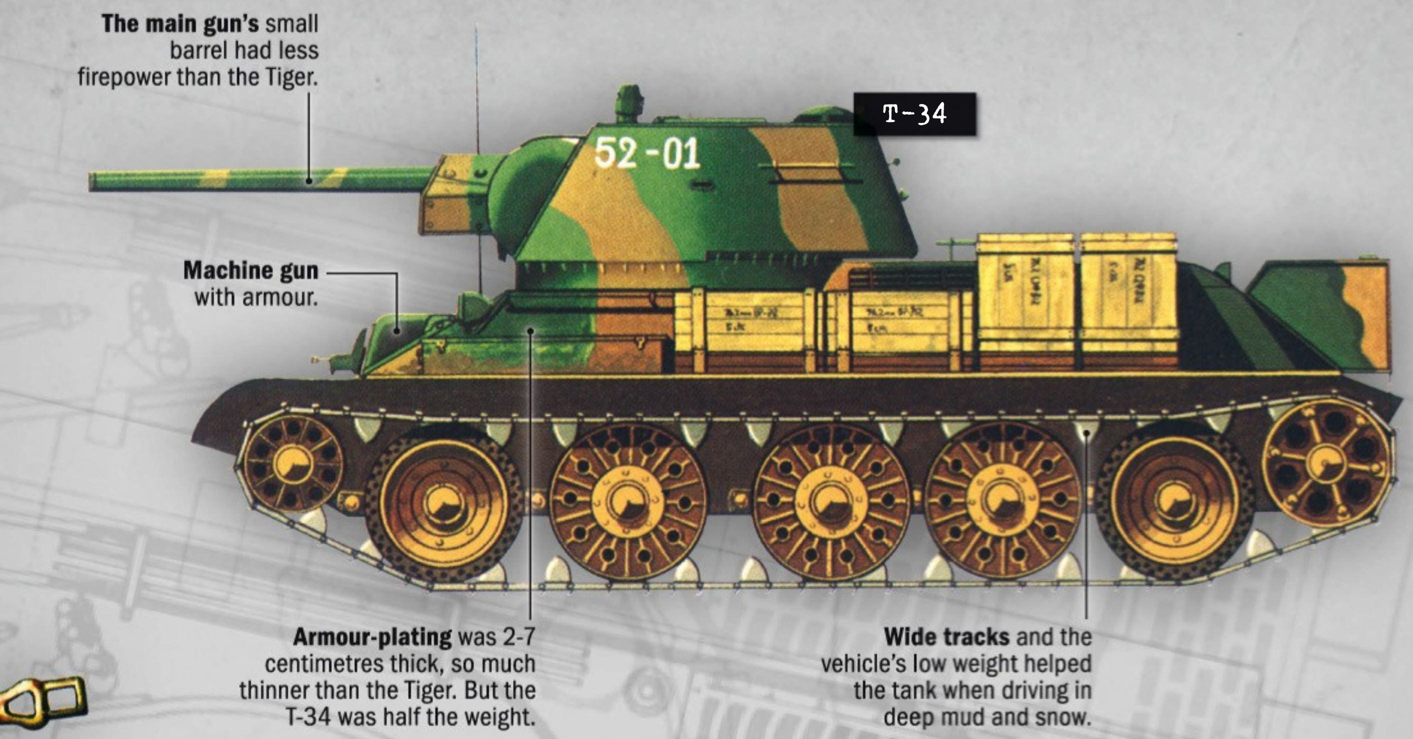
The 5th SS Panzer Division was awarded this pocket watch to mark the fighting on the Eastern Front.

grenades and portable mines to keep the Soviet foot soldiers away from German tanks. But the Red Army had no intention of giving up Prokhorovka. Around 900 Soviet tanks emerged from their hiding places behind bushes or inside ravines to roll over the hills. According to German eyewitnesses, it was a terrifying sight: “Racing at full speed and firing from all barrels, T-34 after T-34 rolled over the hill, right into the middle of our infantry positions. We opened fire,” recounted German anti-tank soldier Hubert Neuzert.

Although the Germans posed a formidable foe with 80 Tigers and 520 other tanks, the 900 Soviet T-34s were an overwhelming force. They deliberately attacked at full speed to get as close to the Tigers as possible. These tactics ensured they’d avoid becoming sitting ducks for the Tigers’ long-range guns. It meant tanks fired at each other from no more than a few hundred metres’ distance, and sometimes at point-blank range. Lieutenant General Pavel Rotmistrov, commanding the Soviet 5th Guards Tank Army, described the battle as chaotic:

“The shells fired at close range pierced not only the side armour but also the frontal armour of the fighting vehicles. At such range, there was no protection in armour and the length of the gun barrels was no longer decisive. Frequently, when a tank was hit, its ammunition and fuel blew up and the torn-off turrets were flung through the air over dozens of yards. On the black, scorched earth, the gutted tanks burnt like torches. It was difficult to establish which side was attacking and which was defending.”

Military historians disagree over the exact number of tanks destroyed at Prokhorovka, but German losses



The main gun’s small barrel had less firepower than the Tiger.

Machine gun with armour.

Armour-plating was 2-7 centimetres thick, so much thinner than the Tiger. But the T-34 was half the weight.

Wide tracks and the vehicle’s low weight helped the tank when driving in deep mud and snow.

Primitive but effective

The Soviet T-34 was well armoured and drove fast and far on a single tank of fuel. In contrast, it lacked firepower. Until the Tiger’s debut in WWII, the Red Army’s T-34 was the world’s best-armoured vehicle. The Soviets had realised that a tank’s armour should be curved, so enemy shells rebounded off without doing any harm. The principle was later copied by the Germans.

Weight	28 tonnes
Engine	500 hp
Gun	76.2 mm
Top speed	55 km/h
Range	400 km
Crew	4 men

The T-34 was technically inferior to the Tiger but that made it easier for the crew to repair in the field.

"Fierce fighting on the ground and in the air [has] developed."

German propaganda reporting the beginning of the Battle of Kursk

were probably around 200, including around 30 Tigers, while the Soviets lost 500. The disparity was down to the fact the German tanks were both technologically superior and crewed by more skilled personnel. Each German tank had its own radio, too, while the Soviets only fitted radios to their lead vehicles. This gave German commanders far better control of their units, enabling them to co-ordinate defence and attack more effectively than the Soviets, who bumbled forward haphazardly, taking any opportunities that arose. German crews were also better trained, able to aim more precisely and thus make more direct hits.

The Soviet tactic of mass attacks was also costly, because the Germans merely needed to fire at the mass of tanks to make an impact. A German tank could easily take out two or three T-34s before it was hit. Historians estimate that approximately 700 tanks were destroyed during the Battle of Prokhorovka, which would make it the largest tank battle ever. But casualty figures are unclear because both sides underestimated their own losses while exaggerating their victories. In addition, troops often misreported tank losses, reporting tanks as lost despite the fact they remained operational after being hit. Often, minor damage was repaired quickly by either crews or mechanics at the front, after which the tanks returned to action. A tank could easily be counted as lost two or three times before it was finally destroyed.

The Soviets were ready for the German attack at Kursk, thanks to a spy's report.

Germans won a hollow victory

As darkness fell, the battle petered out. Technically, it counted as a German victory based on the number of destroyed tanks. But it came at a huge cost – for the Germans, any destroyed tank was a major setback because the arms factories could no longer produce enough tanks to make up for the losses at the front, never mind the fact they were far from the Eastern Front battlefields.

The Germans had invested in tanks with high technical specifications, while the Russians focused on mass-producing T-34s. In 1943, the T-34 may have been far more primitive than German Tiger and Panther models, but it had one major advantage: it was proven technology, both reliable and easy to repair, thanks to its simple engine, gearbox and tracks. The German Tigers and Panthers were far more complicated machines, requiring much more in the way of maintenance and repair – the engines often broke down under the heavy armour, for example.

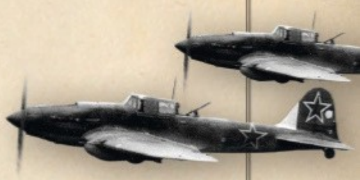
The Soviets could easily sacrifice 500 tanks at Prokhorovka because they had so many in reserve. The Germans couldn't afford their losses, so in reality, the Wehrmacht was the loser. On 13th July, the Russians launched another offensive around 300 kilometres south of Kursk, placing Germany's Army Group South under severe pressure in both Russia and the Ukraine. At the same time, they launched a series of smaller operations to the north of Kursk.

To make matters worse, the Allies were pushing forwards in southern Italy. Their advance wasn't swift, but it tied up numerous German forces. The deteriorating situation on both fronts forced Hitler to eventually abandon Operation Citadel. It would be his last offensive campaign in the east.

The Red Army was no longer a soft touch, as Colonel General Hermann Hoth remarked wryly in the aftermath of Kursk: "The Russians have learnt a lot since 1941. They are no longer peasants with simple minds. They have learnt the art of war from us."

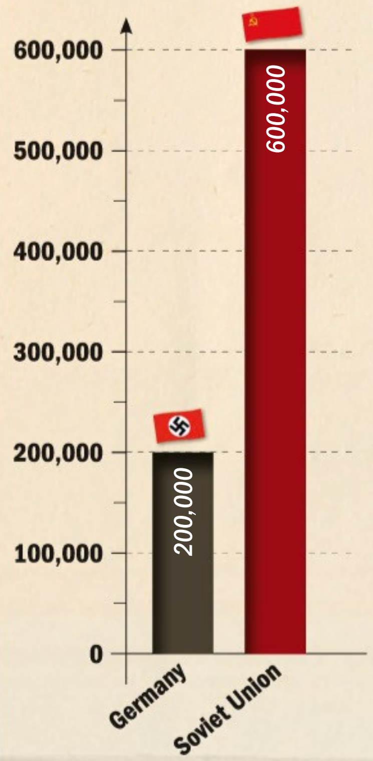
Germans never recovered

Soviet casualties during the battle were monstrous and far surpassed the Germans, but while the Red Army had inexhaustible reserves of both soldiers and equipment, German resources were limited, and the Wehrmacht never recovered from the offensive at Kursk.



Stalin's losses were far greater than Hitler's

Soldiers



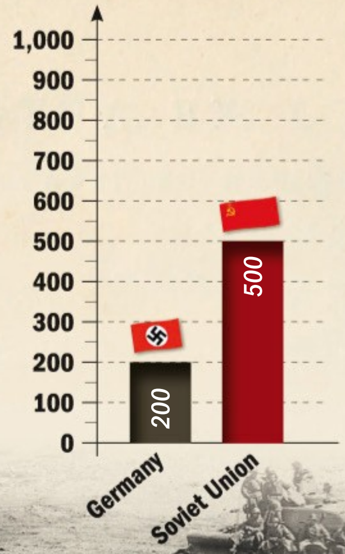
Soviets bled

The Red Army lost half of its troops at the Battle of Kursk. They were either killed, wounded or captured.

Tanks

Red Army sacrificed armour

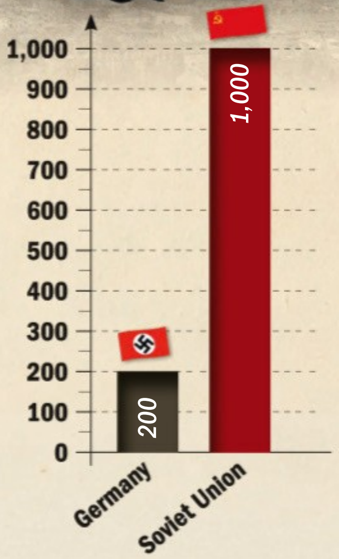
The Soviets lost far more tanks than their opponent, but they managed to maintain tank production in contrast to the Germans, who were unable to keep up with their losses.



Mass production of T-34s helped the Soviets greatly at Kursk.

Planes

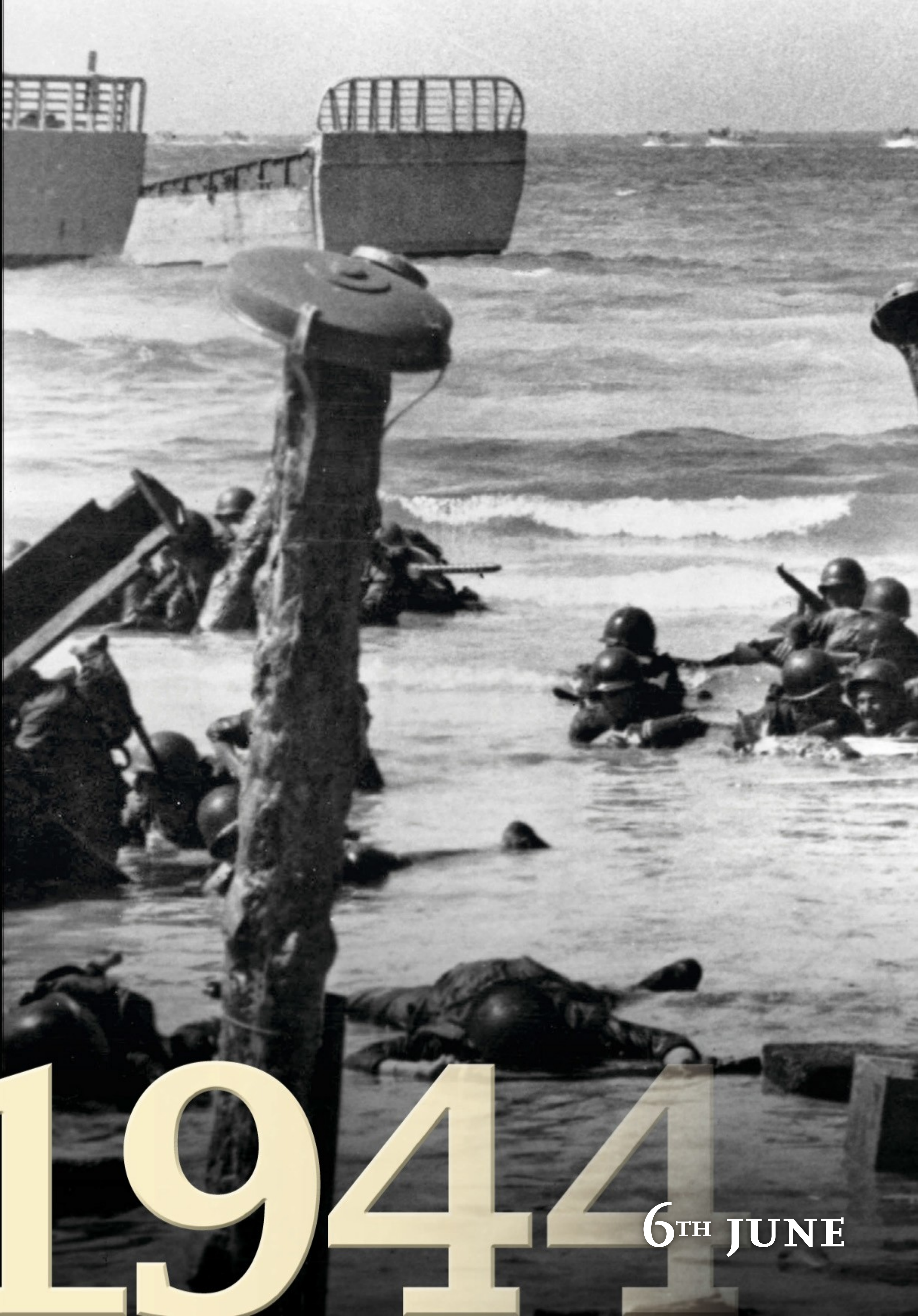
Soviet planes swarmed over the battlefields of Kursk in 1943.



Germans lost a quarter

Soviet wrecking tactics extended to the air battles. The 200 German aircraft that were lost cost the hard-pressed Luftwaffe dearly.

Two Soviets wait for the enemy's attack. A dead German soldier lies off to one side.



1944

6th JUNE

Allied forces landing on the Normandy beaches had to get past a series of deadly obstacles, such as "Czech hedgehogs" and "Rommel's asparagus", as well as a hail of gunfire.

INVASION OF NORMANDY

HELL AWAITED US SOLDIERS ON OMAHA BEACH

History's largest armada set sail from the south coast of England. Its aim was to invade Normandy and wrest Western Europe from Hitler's grip. But the Germans stood ready behind a deadly defence on the cliffs above Omaha Beach. The price of victory would be high.

Normandy 1944

THE STAGE IS SET

Omaha Beach
France

The Allies have been planning a large-scale landing in France since 1940. By spring 1944, the invasion force is ready, but on the other side of the Channel, the Germans have put together a formidable defence. The coast is protected by strong fortifications, while Nazi machine guns stand ready to give Allied troops a warm welcome.

German scout Corporal Heinrich Severloh focussed his binoculars. It was 05.30 on 6th June 1944, and he'd spent all night looking out across the English Channel from a cold observation post on the Normandy cliffs. As the morning fog cleared, a series of black dots appeared over the horizon, and through his binocular lenses, Severloh watched with horror as they grew.

The dots coalesced into ships – lots of them, of various sizes. As they drew closer to shore, the ominous drone of aircraft sounded in the air.

"They're coming!" shouted frightened German soldiers, as they sprinted for the nearest bunker or shelter.

The bombers roared across the coast, releasing their deadly cargo. The first bomb exploded just 50 metres behind Severloh's position, throwing up soil and lumps of limestone around the corporal in the quaking bunker. The Germans breathed a sigh of relief as the rest of the Allied bombs fell in fields and forests behind them.

Meanwhile, the silhouettes of the enemy ships became clearer against the steel grey sky, and within moments, the vessels' guns began to shake the earth under the Germans once more. Over the next half hour, 10,600 rockets and shells roared over the shore. On the clifftop, the air became thick with smoke and dust.

When Severloh again trained his binoculars on the water, he saw hundreds of landing craft heading over the waves. The corporal sprinted to the communications bunker. "Now it's starting! They're landing!" he yelled to his superior. The lieutenant, however, showed no fear as he thought of the formidable firepower that awaited the US troops and said simply: "Poor swine."

Soldiers made sure they lifted their arms above the water as they came ashore.

When the tide was low, troops with heavy artillery could move forward on the beach.

Allies expected losses in the thousands

The German army knew that at some point in 1944 the Allies would embark on a large-scale landing on the continent – probably in France – but knowing exactly where and when became a major headache for Hitler and his generals.

The US and Britain had been preparing the invasion – Operation Overlord – for years, and deceiving the Germans was a crucial part of the plan. While double agents filled the Nazis with false intelligence, the Allies set up a whole ghost army with inflatable tanks and fake planes in Dover on the Kentish coast to fool the Germans into thinking that the landing would be made in or around Calais.

In fact, the plan was to storm the beaches of Normandy shortly after paratroopers had been dropped inland to capture key bridges and prevent German reinforcements being deployed to aid the defenders on the beaches.

Hitler's infamous Atlantic Wall fortifications meant the entire French coastline was heavily guarded, but the Allies hoped the Nazis would succumb to the pressure of the 150,000 soldiers who would go ashore on D-Day. Operation Overlord commanders Dwight D Eisenhower and Bernard Montgomery knew that thousands of soldiers would be killed on the beaches, but the generals were ready to pay such a high price to crush Nazi Germany.

While British and Canadian troops were tasked with capturing the eastern beaches, code-named Sword, Juno and Gold, the Americans would invade Omaha and Utah. All targets were carefully photographed from aircraft. But one detail was not caught on the photographs. The eight-kilometre-long Omaha Beach was not – as the Americans mistakenly believed – defended by inexperienced soldiers. Instead, it was manned by seasoned veterans called in from the Eastern Front.

From an advanced system of bunkers on top of the 40-metre-high cliffs, defenders had an ideal view of the beach, with barbed wire, mines and purpose-built barriers providing a deadly obstacle course for the attacking forces. Only five gullies led inland, and they were thoroughly covered by German machine guns and artillery.

When the Allied ships set sail from various ports along the south coast, the soldiers taking part in this perilous mission were in no doubt that this could be their last.

“I consoled myself with the fact that I was insured for the maximum amount of the GI insurance plan, and that my parents would at least have ten thousand dollars to compensate them for my death,” recounted one of the approximately 1,500 men selected for the first assault wave on Omaha.

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“Paratrooper crickets” allowed GIs to distinguish friend from foe. A single click was to be answered by two.

But despite the risk, it was also clear that the actual invasion, Operation Neptune, was crucial to crushing the Third Reich. Eisenhower had ingrained the message in each soldier.

“You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you,” were the general’s words that were read to the men on the ships on the evening of 5th June.

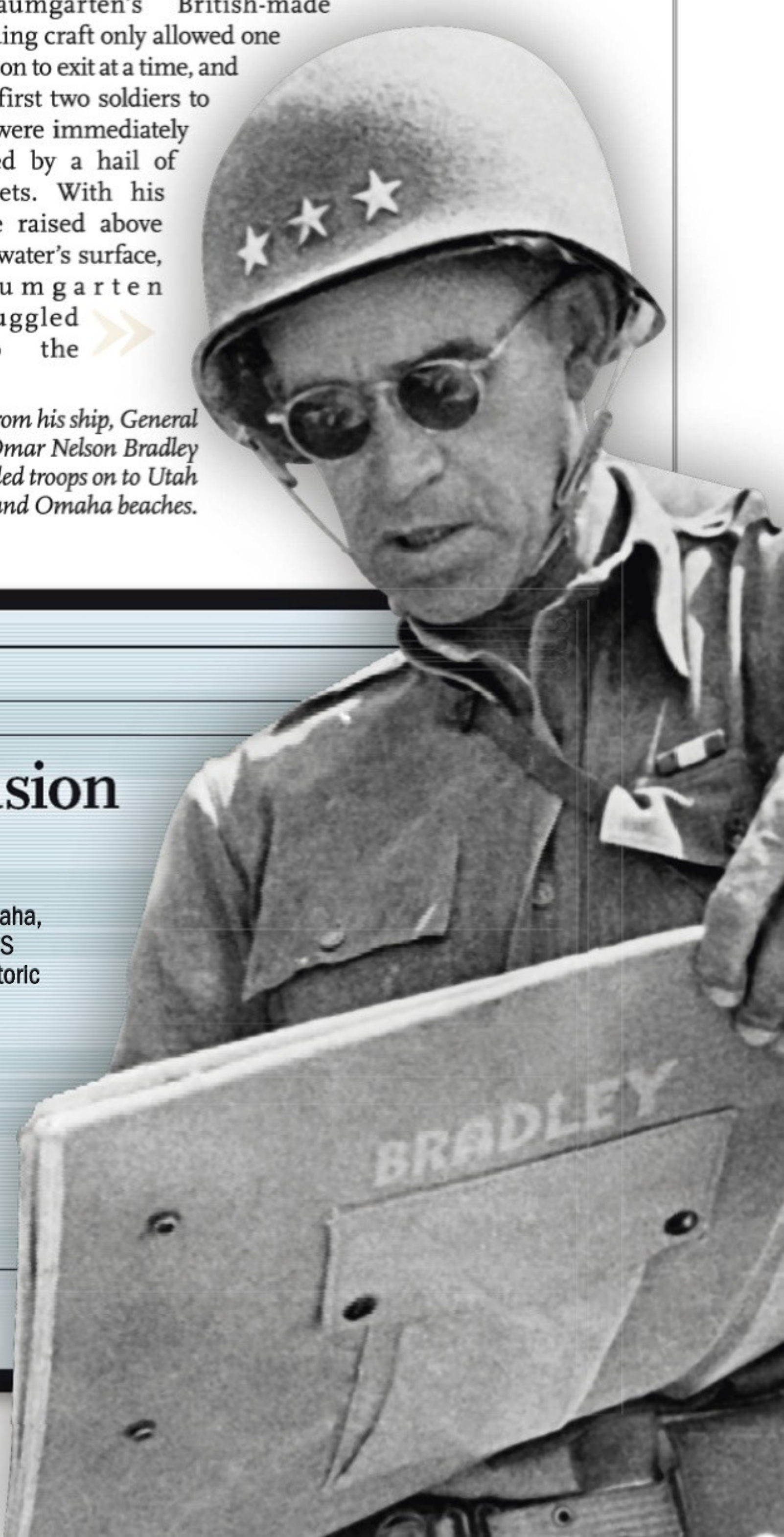
Soldiers died in the landing boats

As the clock ticked towards 06.30 on 6th June, the Allies’ flat-bottomed landing craft had been bouncing over half-metre waves for an hour en route to the Normandy coast. Water splashed into the vessels, soaking the 30-odd men crammed into each one. The Americans had already enjoyed a substantial breakfast with “as much steak, pork, chicken, ice cream, and candy” as they could eat, as one infantryman put it. But the heavy seas exacted their revenge as one seasick soldier after another emptied the contents of his stomach out on deck.

“I was so seasick I didn’t care if a bullet hit me between the eyes and got me out of my misery,” recalled a combat engineer.

US soldier Harold Baumgarten, from Company B, 29th Infantry Division, had avoided seasickness in part by chewing gum and sucking on sweets while continuously swallowing. But the 19-year-old New Yorker was unable to avoid nausea after the neighbouring boat was hit by a shell, and splintered metal and body parts rained into his boat. Up ahead, hell awaited, and when the ramp went down, they would all become a part of it.

Baumgarten’s British-made landing craft only allowed one person to exit at a time, and the first two soldiers to try were immediately felled by a hail of bullets. With his rifle raised above the water’s surface, Baumgarten struggled into the »



From his ship, General Omar Nelson Bradley led troops on to Utah and Omaha beaches.

1893-1981

NAME **OMAR NELSON BRADLEY**

TITLE GENERAL

General Bradley led invasion from the sea

With primary responsibility for the forces that invaded Utah and Omaha, General Omar Nelson Bradley played a leading role on D-Day. The US general did not doubt that the invasion of Normandy would be a historic milestone: “This is going to be the greatest show on earth. You are honoured by having grandstand seats,” he promised troops. But he conceded he was too far away from the action during the invasion. Radio communication broke down, and Bradley wrote after the war that the battle was beyond the reach of the generals and admirals.

Among the rank and file, Bradley was known as polite and easy to deal with, giving him the name “The Soldiers’ General”. Bradley was made a five-star general in 1950 – one of just nine Americans to attain the rank.

- **Was a big fan of horse racing and visiting racecourses.**
- **Died of cardiac arrhythmia, minutes after being honoured.**

water and towards the beach. Bullets whipped past, but he made it ashore to take cover behind an anti-tank Belgian Gate, one of the many obstacles left on the beach. Unfortunately, his first act was to witness a comrade killed in the surf.

"While running, we witnessed horrible sights… There were men with guts hanging out of their wounds and body parts lying along our path," Baumgarten recounted.

Single German initiated slaughter

Even before the first Allies had placed a foot on Omaha beach, Severloh had tumbled into Widerstandsnest 62 – one of the 14 main bunkers along the beach's cliffs. WN 62 contained two 76.5-mm guns, one anti-tank gun and a grenade launcher, but Severloh grabbed one of the bunker's MG 42 machine guns that could fire 1,400 rounds per minute.

Through the lookout, he saw how the landing boats approached the beach one by one, and the moment a ramp was lowered, he resolutely squeezed the hot metal trigger. "I do not know how many men I shot," Severloh admitted in 2004. "It was awful. Thinking about it makes me want to throw up. I almost emptied an entire infantry landing craft. The sea was red around it."

Such thoughts hadn't burdened the corporal in the heat of battle, however. When he wasn't firing deadly volleys at the landing boats, Severloh shot at anything that moved in the water and on the beach. As the tide was still low, the Americans' boots sank into the sand as they reached the shore, making them easy targets as they stumbled forward. Many – like Baumgarten – tried sheltering behind the Germans' obstacles or the few amphibious vehicles that had reached land after battling the rigours of the waves.

Severloh, who became known as the "Beast of Omaha" for his exploits, was periodically forced to switch to a Karabiner 98k bolt-action rifle, allowing him to target individual soldiers while his machine gun cooled down.

Meanwhile, the Germans could watch from their bunker holes as the tide rose minute by minute, slowly sliding over the wounded GIs on the beach, filling their lungs with water. US soldiers had strict orders not to rescue the wounded; it was simply too dangerous. Instead, they battled to reach a seawall 300 metres up the beach, from where they could shelter from German bullets.

Baumgarten struggled across the beach, all the time looking for a hiding place, when an 88-mm shell suddenly exploded 20 metres in front of him, its shrapnel tearing through his left cheek. His upper jaw was shattered, and his palate ripped in two.

Despite his horrific injuries, Baumgarten still managed to reach the wall, where he threw himself down alongside those from the 116th Infantry Regiment who had also made it that

The moment the ramps went down on the landing boats, US GIs were exposed to enemy bullets. Many did not even reach the beach – some were caught in the high seas and their heavy equipment pulled them under the water.

PARACHUTE FORCES		
🇺🇸	TROOPS:	13,000
† DEAD OR WOUNDED:		3,650
🇬🇧	TROOPS:	8,500
† DEAD OR WOUNDED:		1,500

The Douglas C-47 Skytrain got soldiers off the ground.

far. At this point, the troops were in shock, according to one corporal: "There were men crying with fear, men defecating themselves. I lay there with some others, too petrified to move... It was like a mass paralysis. I couldn't see an officer. At one point something hit [me] on the arm. I thought I'd taken a bullet. It was somebody's hand, taken clear off by something."

COOL GENERAL RESCUED THE OFFENSIVE

Amid the chaos, Brigadier General Norman D Cota waded ashore. From his landing boat, the 51-year-old American – second in command of the 29th Infantry Division – had seen how hordes of tanks, bulldozers and amphibious vehicles either capsized in the waves or sailed into the German mines. Without proper artillery support, Cota knew that he had to rally the surviving Americans to cross the heavily mined beach. From here, they could advance through the marshlands to reach the cliffs from where the Germans bombarded the open beach.

"Two kinds of people are staying on this beach," he told the troops cowering behind the seawall. "The dead and those who are going to die. Now let's get the hell out of here."

Cota waved his .45 Colt as he walked along the wall to find a suitable target site. His fearlessness rubbed off on the men. While a soldier fired against a defence position on the nearest cliff with his Browning automatic rifle, other soldiers placed Bangalore torpedoes underneath the barbed-wire barricades. The explosive charges in the metre-long pipes went off, and when the wire was split, the first American climbed through the opening. The unfortunate soldier was promptly pierced by bullets from a German machine gun shell.

"Medico! Medico, I'm hit. Help me!" cried the soldier. His cries of "Mama" finally ebbed away as he died, and the sight of their stricken comrade led to further hesitation – until General Cota once again took control.

"C'mon! If an old buzzard like me can do that so can you," the general said resolutely, wading through the burning and smoking grass of marshland without hesitation.

Soon the rest of the group followed, while others on the seawall also dared to enter the dangerous minefield. In the absence of minesweepers, the vanguard crept forward with hunting knives, and a few soldiers were blown up as a warning to their colleagues further behind. No one had time to help tend open fractures or torn hands. The enemy bunkers on the cliffs had to be put out of action if the nightmare was to finally end.

DESTROYERS TIPPED THE BALANCE

The Germans had complete control of Omaha Beach for the first three hours that morning. The chaotic landing in high seas that had drowned soldiers and capsized amphibious vehicles had left the invaders more vulnerable than expected. They lost hundreds of soldiers in the first attack wave alone, and many more like Harold Baumgarten were so badly wounded that they could not fight on.

Out at sea, Commander Omar Nelson Bradley from the USS *Augusta* had ordered his forces towards both Utah and Omaha beach, yet it was also clear that the advance forces had not secured control. The disaster at Omaha was so bad that at 09.15, Bradley contemplated withdrawing his troops from the bloody beach to concentrate purely on Utah.

The general decided to stay the course, however, and at 09.50, he ordered his destroyers to sail towards the coast to reduce the German bunkers to rubble. At a

Skytrain flew during battle

820 US transport aircraft showed their worth the night before D-Day when they dropped paratroopers into France.

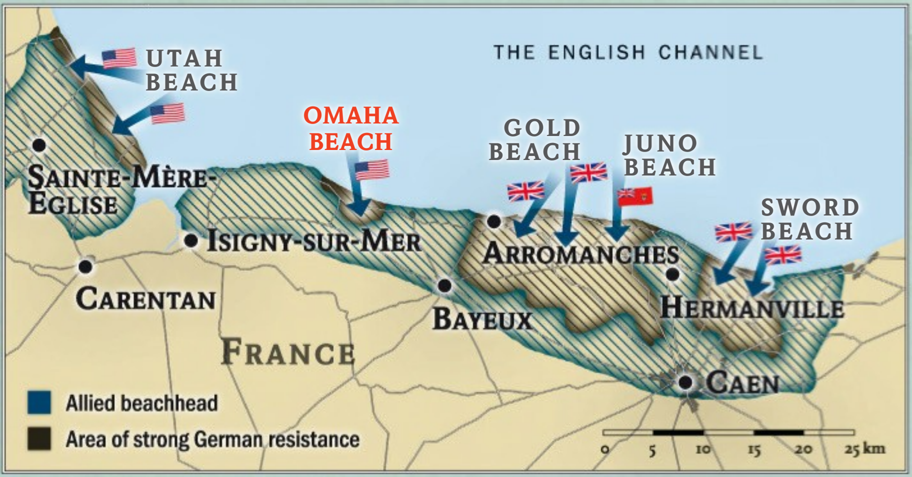
A fleet of 820 C-47 Skytrains played a crucial role on the night before the invasion by ferrying 13,000 paratroopers inland behind the Normandy coast. The paratroopers' main mission was to capture the hinterland's key bridges and roads to prevent German reinforcements from joining their ranks.

The aircraft proved extremely robust. Despite massive shelling, the Germans only managed to shoot down 21 of the planes. More Skytrains were hit and damaged but managed to make the return journey across the English Channel. Here mechanics repaired the planes so quickly they were able to fly again.

On the evening of 5th June 1944, General Dwight D Eisenhower roused paratroopers for battle.

14 hours of fighting on the beach

Over the course of more than half a day, Allied invasion forces fought for control of the almost 500-metre-wide Omaha Beach. The soldiers risked life and limb before they finally won control of the D-Day invasion's bloodiest beach.


THE ENGLISH CHANNEL
UTAH BEACH
OMAHA BEACH
GOLD BEACH
JUNO BEACH
SWORD BEACH
SAINTE-MÈRE-EGLISE
ISIGNY-SUR-MER
ARROMANCHES
CARENTAN
BAYEUX
HERMANVILLE
FRANCE
CAEN
Allied beachhead
Area of strong German resistance
0 5 10 15 20 25 km

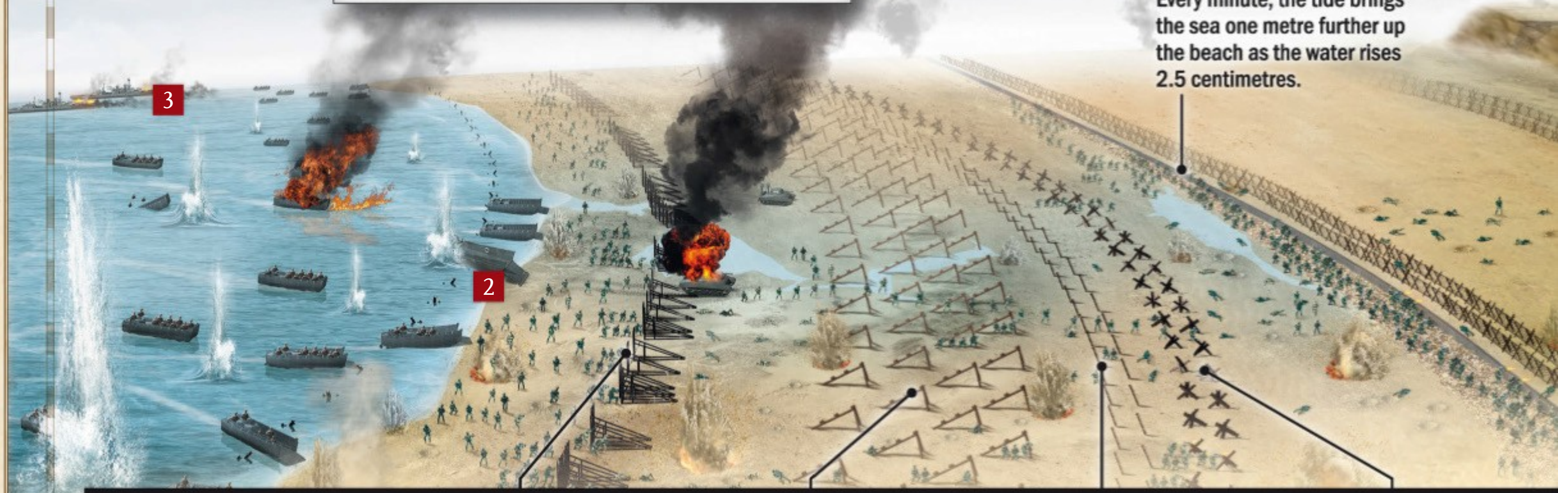
Five beaches secured a foothold on the mainland
Around 150,000 Allied soldiers invaded the coast of Normandy. Commanders chose these beaches not because they were relatively close to the English coast, but because the German defences weren't as solid here as in the densely fortified area around Calais.

1 The bombardment begins

■ **05.30:** Allied bombers begin the assault on Omaha Beach. **The bombs fail to have any impact**, however, as they land behind the German bunkers; 15 minutes later they're joined by guns from battleships sitting off the coast, again to no effect.

2 The first troops go ashore

■ **06.30:** Landing boats reach the beach before the tide has covered the German defence system of Belgian Gates, wooden stakes, mines and Czech hedgehogs. German machine guns start firing as they disembark. **Soldiers must move 300 metres** to find shelter behind a seawall.



Every minute, the tide brings the sea one metre further up the beach as the water rises 2.5 centimetres.

Deadly obstacles waited on the beach

The Germans placed more than 3,700 obstacles on Omaha Beach alone. Many were designed to slow the enemy landing craft at high tide, so the Allies chose to attack at low tide instead.

Belgian Gates

Heavy iron gates from Belgium, three metres wide and weighing 1,280 kg, were placed to slow Allied tanks.

Wooden beams

At high tide, landing boats would glide up the beam to detonate a Teller mine mounted on top of it.

More mines

"Rommel's asparagus" were wooden posts 4-5 metres high with a mine on top – aimed at disrupting paratroopers.

Czech hedgehogs

1.5-metre-high angled beams of iron were used as anti-tank obstacles.

3 Destroyers bomb bunkers

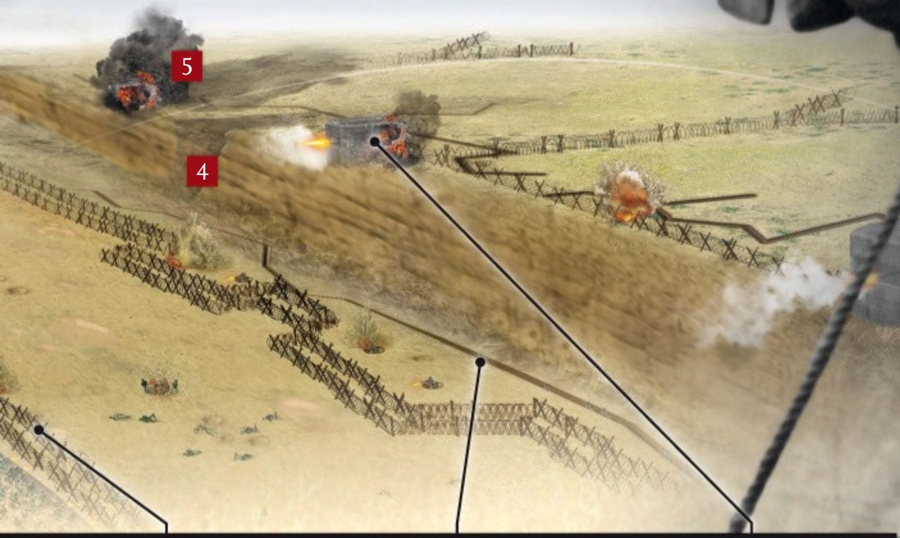
■ **09.50:** After the advance slows with heavy Marine casualties, **Allied destroyers sail closer to shore** – within one kilometre – so they can shell the German fortifications. This, coupled with increasing numbers of tanks reaching the shore, puts the Germans under increasing pressure.

4 Troops clear the ravines

■ **14.00:** US troops occupy the first of five routes leading inland. **Soldiers are now starting to drive tanks and trucks off the increasingly crowded beach**. During the afternoon, the other four roads are also captured.

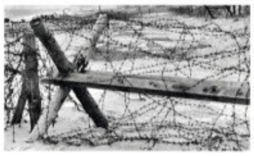
5 Last bastion falls

■ **17.00:** Virtually all German bunkers are already in US hands, **and the final one is taken at 17.00**. By 20.00, three nearby villages are also under Allied control. When the day is done, the forces on Omaha Beach occupy an area 10 kilometres wide that stretches two kilometres inland.



Barbed wire

Behind the seawall, the wire prevented soldiers from advancing forward. Instead, they had to blow their way through.



Machine guns waited

The Nazi machine gunners waited in both trenches and bunkers.

Pockets of resistance

14 bunkers formed the core of Omaha Beach's defences. From these, Germans could cover both the beach and the roads inland. Each bunker was equipped with artillery, mortars and machine guns.

Lanyards with hooks and climbing equipment helped elite forces climb the near-vertical cliff to capture a German gun battery.

The Americans lost seven percent of their invasion force on Omaha Beach. By the evening, once they'd seized the beach, 2,400 men had either died, disappeared or been wounded. Here, the injured wait to be transported away from Omaha.

distance of just 900 metres from the shore, eight US and three British warships sneaked in and fired heavy shells at the enemy. The guns were firing so furiously that sailors had to spray cold water on them to prevent overheating. At the same time, several amphibious vehicles rolled ashore, and soon bulldozers drove into the steep stone wall to make gaps that the tanks could get through. Many of the bodies on the beach were crushed under tonnes of heavy machinery, but the impact of this massive effort couldn't be mistaken – pressure on the Germans grew, and several defences were smashed to smithereens.

"Things look better," a colonel on the beach radioed to the command ship USS *Ancon* at 10.46.

A strong and steady stream of US soldiers now stretched across the marsh in long, serpentine rows, sticking to the paths the others had come through to avoid being blown up by mines.

"The scene below reminded me of the Chicago stockyard cattle pens and its slaughter house," said one private after reaching the bluff.

When the Americans reached the top of the cliff, they threw grenades into the German trenches and bunkers. Although Nazi troops' bullets filled the air around their heads, infantry and US Rangers – American commandos – continued their slow push into German territory. The attackers captured several gun emplacements, while new troops continued to appear from behind the cliffs. As C Company of the 116th Regiment made its way to the top, the unit reached Cota, who stood with his Colt twirling around his finger.

"Where the hell have you been, boys?" was the general's sardonic greeting.

GERMANS FLED THE COAST

Severloh's optimism faded as he watched the US advance through the hole in WN 62's concrete facade. The morning's easy pickings had given way to a more feverish defence as his MG 42 panned around to stop the enemy's soldiers. The Beast of Omaha had fired thousands of bullets at the Americans, but he was running low on ammunition. His only option now was to feed the machine gun with tracer

Paratroopers packed their own parachutes the night before D-Day.

cartridges. Tracers were as deadly as ordinary projectiles but had the enormous disadvantage of lighting up whenever they were fired. Every time he pulled the trigger, he revealed his position.

Over the next 10 minutes, Severloh was flung away from his weapon four times as shells exploded near his bunker. Each time, smoke filled the German's lungs and his ears rang from the explosions. It was time for him and his comrades in WN 62 to flee inland.

Soldier after soldier climbed out of the bunker's opening and ran, searching for shell craters they could use to shelter in briefly during their escape. After 500 metres, Severloh finally dared to catch his breath and wait for those behind, but only one appeared. The two survivors continued to their battalion headquarters in the village of Colleville, 1.5 kilometres from the coast, where a physician treated Severloh's facial wounds.

"We're waiting for the tanks," their commander told them. "Then we'll kick those Americans out again."

What none of them knew was that over 20,000 Allied paratroopers had landed the previous night, capturing key bridges to prevent German reinforcements from arriving at the beaches. At the same time, Allied fighter-bombers had been targeting tanks that attempted to cross the fields. The Germans' ability to maintain control of the Normandy coastline was about to be exhausted.

The Allies established beachheads

By 12.30, the Americans had landed 18,772 troops on Omaha, and landing craft continued to unload vehicles and equipment on to the beach. Little by little, the sound of German gunfire grew silent. At 13.09, Bradley received an encouraging message: "Troops formerly pinned down on beaches... advancing up heights behind beaches."

Fighting continued in the ravines, but within a few hours, they too fell under Allied control. Inside a few bunkers, Germans continued to fight to the last man, as Hitler had ordered, but most defenders took to their heels. At 14.58, forces from General Cota's 29th Division captured Colleville, taking Germans soldiers prisoner in the process.

Meanwhile, army medics remained under pressure on Omaha, where the injured covered the beach. Medics patched up the wounds as best they could and gave the victims shots of morphine, but often they couldn't help much.

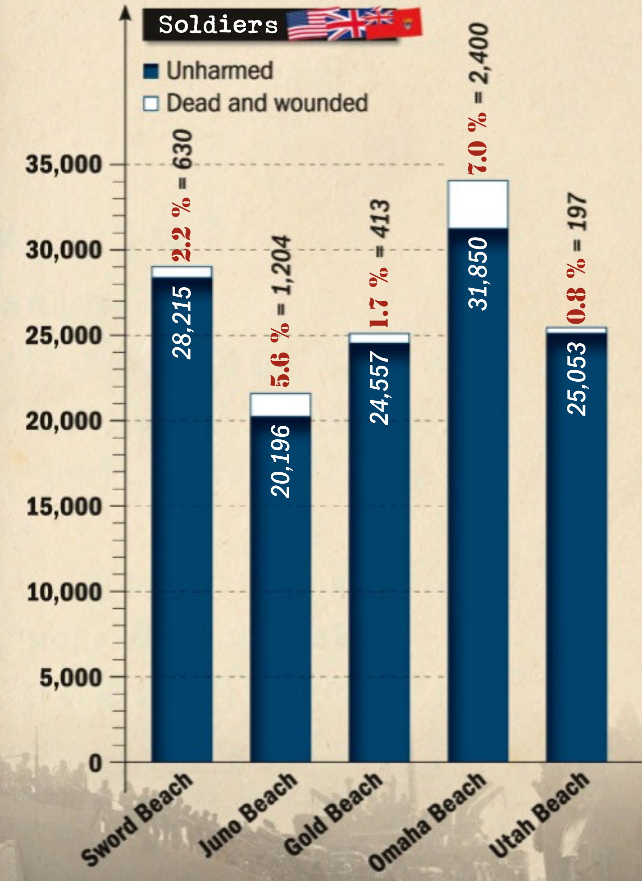
"I saw one young soldier, pale, crying and in obvious pain with his intestines out under his uniform. There was nothing I could do except inject morphine and comfort him. He soon died," recounted a captain from one of the Americans' medical battalions.

Blood had not so much flowed as gushed on Omaha Beach on 6th June, but the US could rejoice that the victims had not fallen in vain. By evening, the forces had taken the hostile beach and controlled a beachhead just over two kilometres inland. The mission had also succeeded on the four other invasion beaches. During the day at Sword, Juno and Gold beaches, Brits and Canadians had moved almost eight kilometres inland to gain footholds inside the cities of Caen and Bayeux. And at Utah, US troops had lost just 200 men. The total price for the victory was thousands of lives, but the Allies now had a firm foothold on continental Europe, and Nazi Germany's days were numbered.

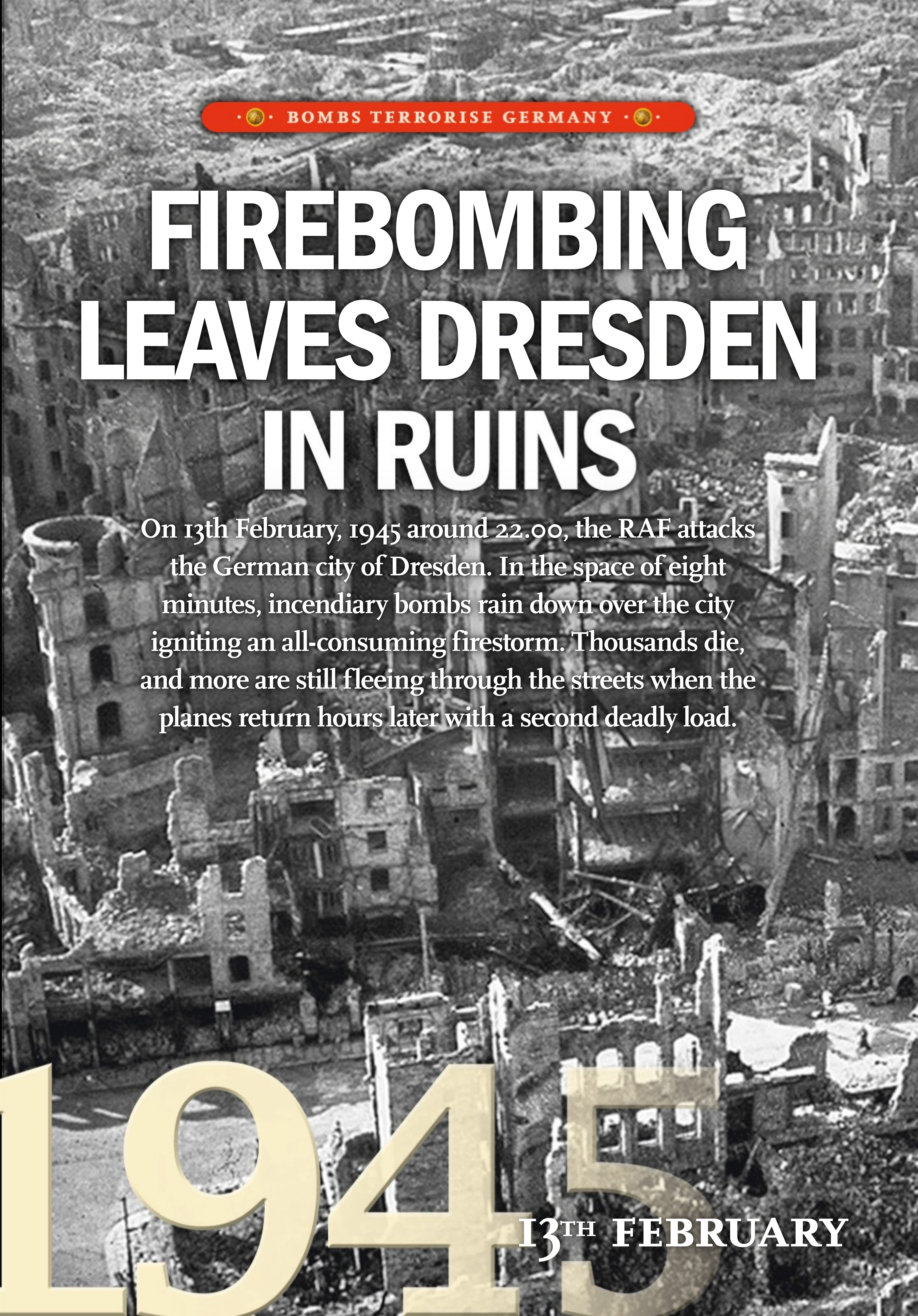
The Allies avoided catastrophe

Although fighting on Omaha Beach was bloody when measured in human lives, the price of D-Day was nowhere near as high as generals had feared.

Allied casualties on D-Day



After the invasion, the Allies were able to land their troops peacefully.



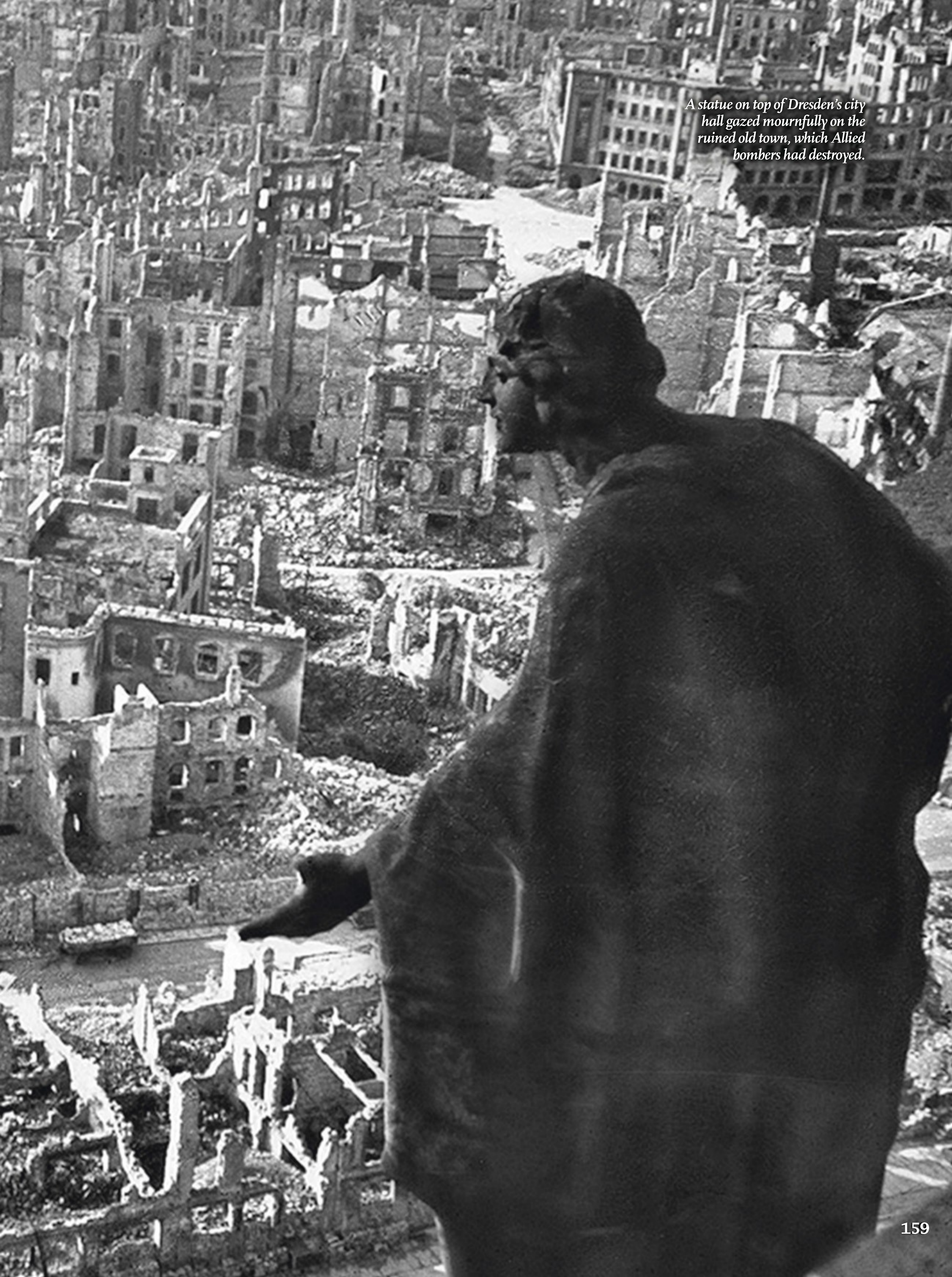
BOMBS TERRORISE GERMANY

FIREBOMBING LEAVES DRESDEN IN RUINS

On 13th February, 1945 around 22.00, the RAF attacks the German city of Dresden. In the space of eight minutes, incendiary bombs rain down over the city igniting an all-consuming firestorm. Thousands die, and more are still fleeing through the streets when the planes return hours later with a second deadly load.

1945

13TH FEBRUARY



A statue on top of Dresden's city hall gazed mournfully on the ruined old town, which Allied bombers had destroyed.

Dresden, 1945

THE STAGE IS SET

Dresden
GERMANY

The German offensive in the Ardennes in December 1944 has shaken the Allies. British and US commanders decide to retaliate by launching a massive bombing raid against a major German city that hasn't yet been affected, in order to devastate the morale of the German populace. The target is chosen: Dresden.

It was late in the evening of 13th February, 1945. The night air was cool, and light clouds drifted across the southern German city of Dresden. The city's inhabitants had celebrated Shrove Tuesday on a spring-like day, but as they made their way home from the famous cafés dotted along the river Elbe the idyll was broken.

Pilots' sunglasses remained in their cases while Dresden was bombed under cover of darkness.

At 21.51, the air sirens began to wail. They'd sounded often during the past five years of war, but each time it had been a false alarm. Although the city folk never seriously believed that Dresden's beautiful baroque buildings would be targeted, children and adults dashed through the Old Town's cobbled streets to their shelters and cellars.

10 minutes later, the first British squadrons – the Pathfinders – dove towards Dresden to drop target flares ahead of the main assault. At this moment, Dresden's civilians realised that it wasn't only factories and railway installations being attacked, but the city's historical centre too.

A shrill voice crackled over the radio, urging people to urgently seek cover. High above Dresden, British bomber squadrons flew unchallenged over the suburbs. Four hours previously, 255 aircraft had left British airspace, but despite the long journey, they'd encountered virtually no resistance.

The first bomber, named U for Uncle, opened its hatches at 22.14. "Bombs gone", the radio sounded as the deadly payload tumbled out of the plane's belly. Thousands of frightened citizens gathered in their basements and shelters, praying, crying and holding on to each other tightly.

Bomber triggers firestorm

Planes flew over Dresden's centre at a rate of one every seven seconds. Endless whistling cut through the air before deafening explosions rang out. The pressure generated blew up iron doors, left buildings trembling and saw plaster rattle down walls; then followed the incendiary bombs.

"It felt as if someone directly above me was shaking out coal or potatoes onto the roof", said schoolgirl Nora Lang, who hid terrified in her family's apartment block basement. "Then sometimes would come this hissing and an explosion".

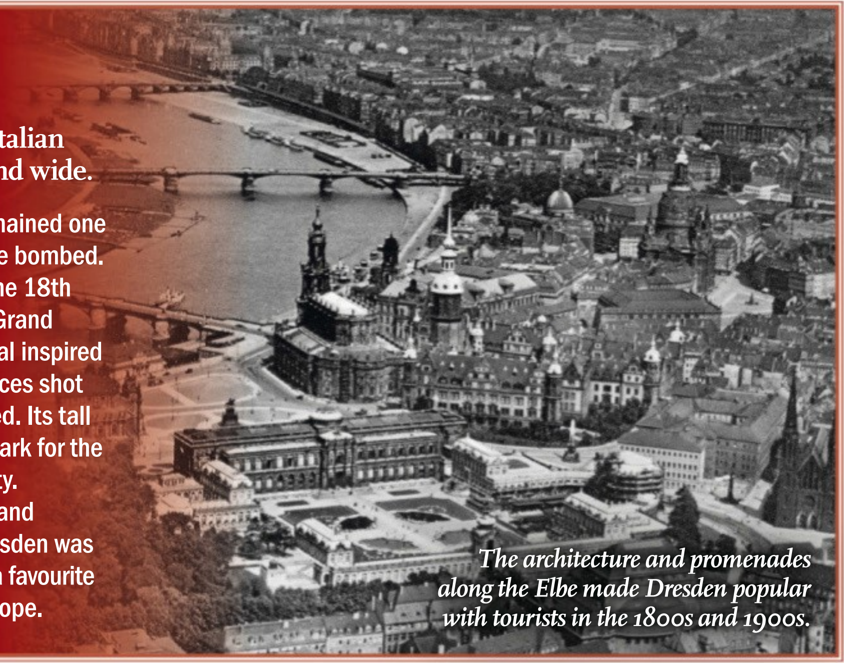
Thousands of magnesium bombs tumbled through the rooftops and ignited a host of small fires. In the space

The pearl on the Elbe

Dresden's architecture was inspired by Italian models and the city was renowned far and wide.

Towards the end of World War II, Dresden remained one of a select number of German cities yet to be bombed. The city had been an architectural gem since the 18th Century when Augustus II, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, created an impressive capital inspired by Renaissance Italy. Beautiful sandstone palaces shot up and in 1734 the Frauenkirche was completed. Its tall dome made the church Dresden's major landmark for the next 200 years, symbolising the city's prosperity.

Augustus III continued to embellish the city, and created grand promenades along the Elbe. Dresden was nicknamed "Florence of the Elbe" and became a favourite destination attracting tourists from all over Europe.



The architecture and promenades along the Elbe made Dresden popular with tourists in the 1800s and 1900s.

A flight engineer checks the control panel behind his seat next to the pilot in his Lancaster bomber.

BOMBERS

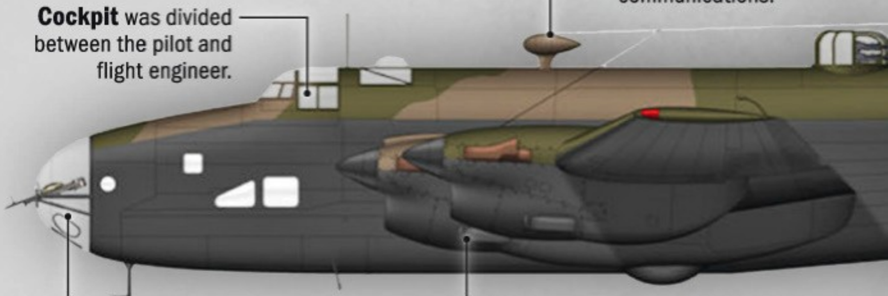
Lancaster was RAF's trump card

The Lancaster played a starring role in the British strategic bombing of Germany, boasting a range twice that of the Halifax and maximum bomb load of almost 10 tons.

Handley Page Halifax four-engine heavy bomber

The Royal Air Force introduced the Halifax into service in November 1940. The plane couldn't load bombs as large and heavy as the Lancaster.

Length	21.81 m
Wingspan	31.74 m
Top speed	498 km/h
Bomb capacity	5,448 kg
Range	2,032 km



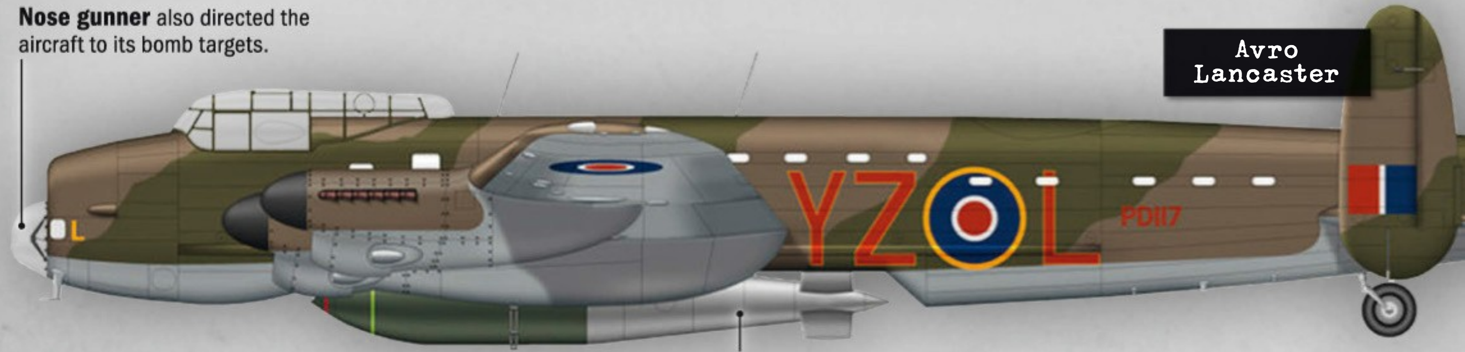
Antenna for radio communications.

Cockpit was divided between the pilot and flight engineer.

Nose gunner possessed two 7.7-mm Browning machine guns.

Each engine was a Rolls-Royce Merlin with Rotol wood propellers, providing 1,280 hp.

Nose gunner also directed the aircraft to its bomb targets.



Bomb load could contain a single Grand Slam bomb weighing almost 10,000 kg.

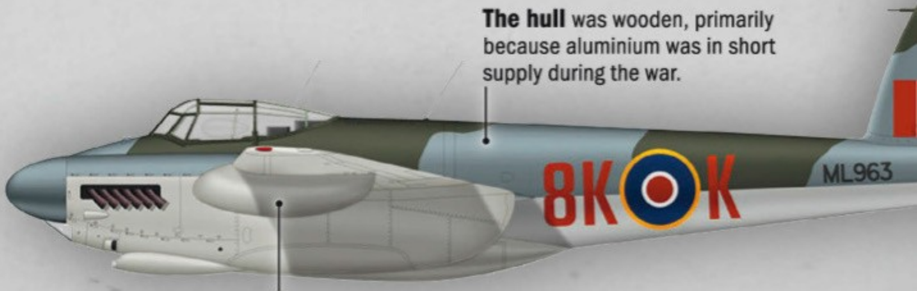
Aft machine guns were two or four 7.7-mm Brownings.

De Havilland Mosquito fighter

The Mosquito's high top speed made it particularly suitable for pinpoint operations and precision bombing deep inside enemy territory.

Length	12.64 m
Wingspan	16.5 m
Top speed	669 km/h
Bomb capacity	1,816 kg
Range	2,395 km

The hull was wooden, primarily because aluminium was in short supply during the war.



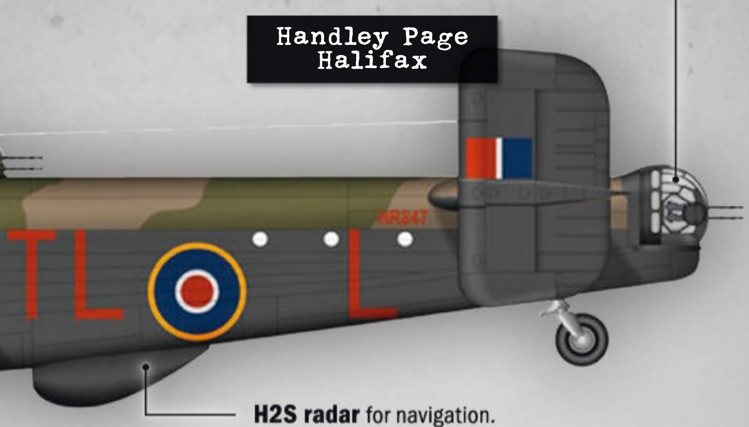
The engines were twin Rolls-Royce Merlin Mk 23 or Mk 25.

of eight minutes, the British dropped 881 tons of bombs, after which the bombers turned home.

The Dresden fire service had no chance of getting the flames under control. The first explosive bombs had shattered buildings into splinters that were now easy to set alight. The many fires merged as temperatures approached 1,000 degrees centigrade. The super-heated air began to rise as a pillar of fire, sucking the oxygen away. 21-year-old engineering student Berthold Meyer experienced the firestorm at close quarters: "My lungs were heaving. My knees began to turn weak. It was horrifying. Some individuals, especially the older people, started to hang back. They would sit down apathetically on the street, or on piles of rubble, and just perish from asphyxiation".

FIRE CONSUMED EVERYTHING

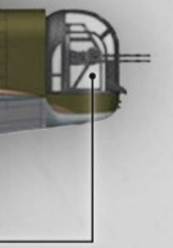
Both trees and people were burned alive as the firestorm enveloped everything in its path. The heat was so intense that buildings and people caught fire without being in direct contact with the flames. The more sensible covered themselves in wet blankets and immediately fled towards the Elbe. Others paused


Rear gunner could keep enemy fighters at bay with four 7.7-mm Browning machine guns
Handley Page Halifax
H2S radar for navigation.

Avro Lancaster four-engine heavy bomber

The Lancaster became operational in February 1942 and was the RAF's most-used heavy bomber in the war, particularly proficient during nightly bombing raids.

■ **Length**	21.08 m
■ **Wingspan**	31 m
■ **Top speed**	462 km/h
■ **Bomb capacity**	9,998 kg
■ **Range**	4,072 km



De Havilland Mosquito

A cargo of large explosive bombs and small firebombs is inspected before the plane's departure.

A pilot's equipment included gloves and a leather helmet with built-in headphones.

to save personal belongings because they thought the bombing was over. But they were terribly mistaken.

The Second World War had felt remote to most of Dresden's inhabitants. A few bombs had been dropped in the surrounding rural areas every now and then, but nothing that caused serious damage or hurt anyone. The war's two fronts were far away, and until now British bombers had not targeted Dresden.

But this picture changed as the war progressed, and Dresden's fate became entwined with the appointment of Arthur "Bomber" Harris as head of the RAF's Bomber Command in February 1942.

One of Harris's first tasks was to implement a new strategy called "area bombing". So far, the British had attempted precision bombing, but nine times out of ten the bombs missed their targets. It was obvious British aircraft weren't accurate enough, so the argument went that "bombing anything in Germany was better than bombing nothing". Harris ordered numerous carpet bombings of specified areas – usually urban centres – using incendiary bombs.

In addition, Harris instructed his bombers to attack in two separate waves, half an hour apart. Experience showed that it increased the chance of creating a devastating firestorm. This had proved true for Hamburg's inhabitants when a twin British attack on 27th July, 1943, sparked a fierce inferno that killed over 40,000 people. After this personal success, Harris made the double attack an ongoing strategy.

DRESDEN WAS A PRIME TARGET

By summer 1944, the Germans were in retreat on all fronts. Allied high command discussed the possibility of forcing Hitler to surrender by launching a giant bombing raid on Berlin, but on 16th December, 1944, the Germans launched a counter-offensive in the Ardennes. 400,000 soldiers accompanied by 1,200 tanks punched a hole through the Allied lines in Belgium.

The Allies were left shaken, and the idea to target only Berlin was dropped. Instead, improved Lancaster aircraft would bomb the morale out of Berlin and other German cities. Chief of the Air Staff Sir Charles Portal imagined that "immense devastation could be produced if the entire attack was concentrated on a single big town other than Berlin and the effect would be especially great if the town was one hitherto undamaged".

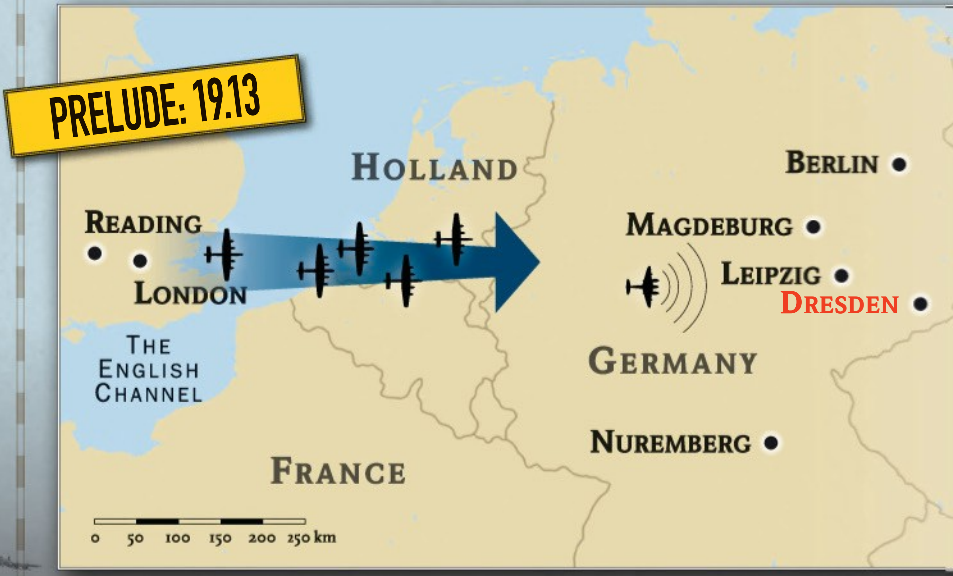
This made Dresden a prime target. It was the seventh largest city in Germany and was largely unscathed. Crucially, however, it was a transport hub in the defence of the Eastern Front.

Every day, troops travelled through Dresden on their way to the battlefields, while thousands of refugees streamed in from the opposite direction. The Red Army was now only 113 kilometres (70 miles) from the city, and the Allies wanted to aid their advance. Intelligence suggested that the Germans could mobilise around 500,000 troops by 15th February. Many would travel through Dresden, so a massive attack on the city's rail network would delay their deployment considerably.

Bomber Command wasn't satisfied with simply bombing railway installations around Dresden, however. If they bombed the city centre, they could destroy communication hubs and – most importantly – create chaos among civilians.

Diversions fooled the Germans

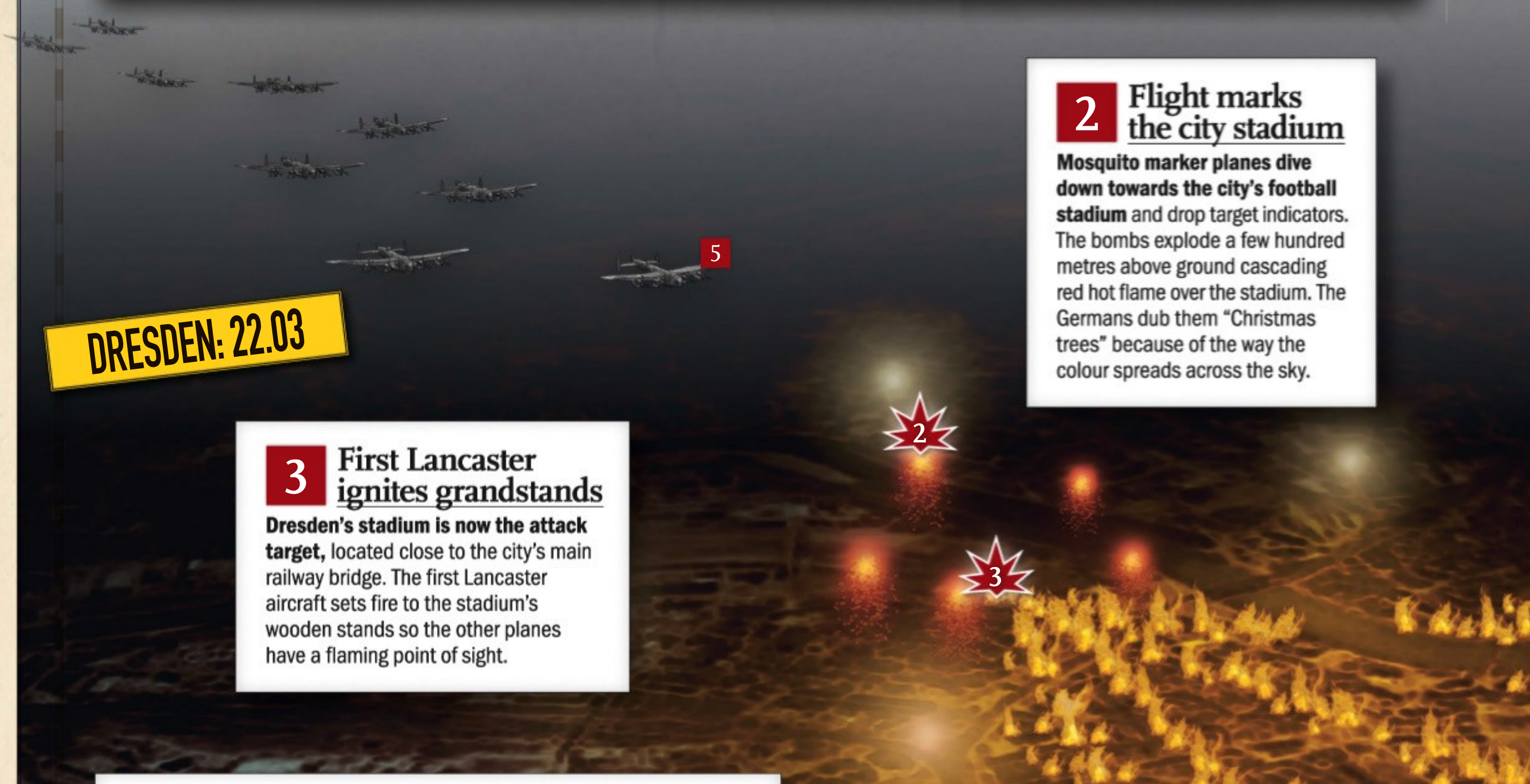
The attack on Dresden involved almost 1,500 aircraft. Half bombed the city itself, while the rest provided diversions in the forms of small-scale bombing and electronic warfare, so even the brightest German radar operators couldn't predict where the main strike would occur.



British attack groups

While the main force of bombers take off from Reading in Berkshire, Mosquito aircraft make fake attacks on Magdeburg. Other smaller groups attack Nuremberg, while 368 Halifax bombers shell an oil refinery at Leipzig. Lancaster aircraft drop strips of aluminium foil that – to German radar – appear to be a huge bomb attack, confusing their defences.

10 Halifax aircraft also fly ahead of the main force, equipped with Mandrel jammers to disrupt German radar signals and hide the bomber formations.



2 Flight marks the city stadium

Mosquito marker planes dive down towards the city's football stadium and drop target indicators. The bombs explode a few hundred metres above ground cascading red hot flame over the stadium. The Germans dub them "Christmas trees" because of the way the colour spreads across the sky.

3 First Lancaster ignites grandstands

Dresden's stadium is now the attack target, located close to the city's main railway bridge. The first Lancaster aircraft sets fire to the stadium's wooden stands so the other planes have a flaming point of sight.

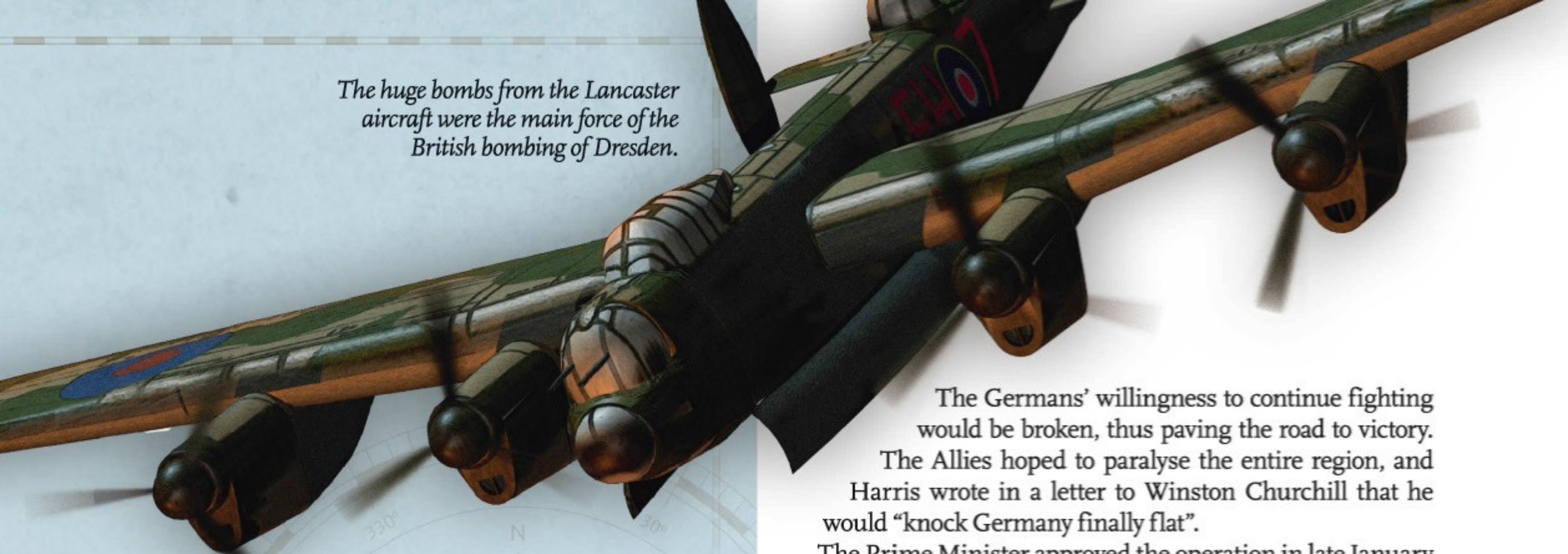
4 Bombs are dropped

The main attack force approaches from the northwest. They're instructed to bomb along each carefully marked route from the stadium to the centre of Dresden. Each aircraft drops a pair of explosive "blockbuster" bombs alongside the bulk of their load: 1,800 kg of magnesium and petroleum incendiary bombs.

A Lancaster aircraft drops its lethal load of high-explosive and incendiary bombs.

5 British launch second attack wave

Three hours later at 01.21, a second wave repeats the procedure. 551 Lancaster bombers – twice as many as the first wave – deliver their final blow. In total, the British drop 3,527 tons of bombs, including 404,400 firebombs.



The huge bombs from the Lancaster aircraft were the main force of the British bombing of Dresden.

The Germans' willingness to continue fighting would be broken, thus paving the road to victory. The Allies hoped to paralyse the entire region, and Harris wrote in a letter to Winston Churchill that he would "knock Germany finally flat".

The Prime Minister approved the operation in late January 1945. Berlin, Dresden and Chemnitz were to be attacked as soon as possible, and on 13th February, weather conditions were finally suitable for a raid on Dresden.

SECOND WAVE COMPLETED FIRESTORM

The inferno rose like a chimney over Dresden. The column of hot air was visible 160 kilometres away as the second wave of bombers swarmed into the city at 01.07. Clouds of smoke rising kilometres into the air disrupted their vision, while the firestorm's fierce heat could be felt in the cockpit at 3 kilometres.

On the ground, it suddenly became apparent more bombs were on their way: "Suddenly we heard the distant hooting of sirens from the south-eastern suburbs: air alert!" Christian Just recalled. "I still remember how some people cried out, 'No! Not again.' And then a scenario began which engraved the inferno of Dresden on my mind: engine noise, the rush of the bombs, the deafening roar of the bombs, a moment of silence and then the same again, and again and again!"

It was like a slaughterhouse. The electricity was out, so the sirens hadn't worked in the centre, meaning the second wave arrived without warning. Many died attempting to escape through the streets, others while they were saving their belongings. Another inhabitant, Gerhard Erich Bähr, had just reached his cellar when the bombs fell again:

"The walls tottered, square stones crashed down on us, the air was full of dust, we couldn't breathe... My legs were buried. On them lay a square of sandstone, a suitcase and a thick grey sack which felt wet... I tried to pull away to get out. I recognised this wasn't a sack, but a man without a head".

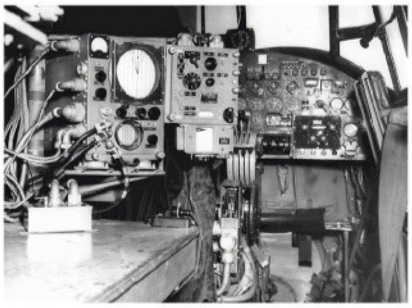
The second wave's additional 1,175 tons of incendiary bombs further intensified the firestorm. Burning wooden beams flew through the air as sparks and flames rained down everywhere. They constantly threatened to blind or mutilate the fugitives struggling to escape from the old town's maze of streets. The heat was so violent that the asphalt roads and pavements melted. Some lost their shoes in a thick porridge of tar, carrying on until their feet were too badly burned. Survival depended on a person's footwear, because those with tight-fitting, sturdy boots had the best chance of escaping the inferno before being devoured by the fierce flames.

LACK OF AIR DEFENCE PROVED COSTLY

When the Allies chose to bomb Dresden, they never imagined the attack would be one of history's most violent. Several factors contributed to the scale of destruction. First and foremost was that the city's air defences were virtually non-existent. Dresden's anti-

1 Pathfinders locate the city and light it up

Lancaster Pathfinders locate Dresden by means of H2S radar and drop magnesium parachute flares. These descend slowly to the ground, illuminating the city for the other planes. Shortly after, the Master Bomber arrives.



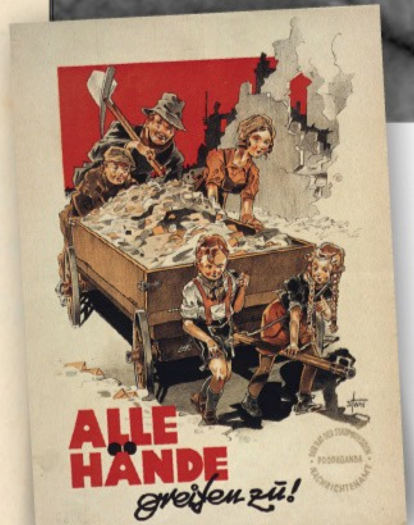
Lancaster bombers were equipped with the advanced H2S radar system for navigation.

FACTS

MASTER BOMBER

- **An experienced pilot** with the title *Master Bomber* led bombing raids. Throughout the attack he would circle the target in his Mosquito aircraft, directing his colleagues to bomb at different angles, heights and times, to reduce the risk of bombing crews hitting each other.

In March 1946, women form a chain as they participate in the reconstruction of their bombed city. Despite the violent terror bombings, the British failed to break the city's morale.



A poster invited all citizens to lend a hand in the reconstruction of Dresden.

aircraft guns had been packed up and shipped to the industrial Ruhr district a few weeks earlier. Compounding this was a shortage of fuel, which meant Germans had to keep their fighters on the ground for as long as possible until they were completely sure where the British were bombing. Oil supplies were so tight that Luftwaffe planes were towed on to the runways by horses and oxen. British bombers were therefore able to fly undisturbed over Dresden.

In addition, the city's bunkers and shelters were inadequate and poorly constructed. Most had no fireproof walls or doors, nor did they have filters to allow oxygen to circulate while keeping toxic gases out.

PRISONERS CLEARED BASEMENTS OF CORPSES

The following day a dirty, grey smoke hung over Dresden. It was so thick many didn't realise it was morning. Fires continued to rage everywhere as survivors and rescue teams picked their way among the ruins. In many places it was still too hot to move, and survivors were met with a grotesque and horrific sight. Margaret Freyer looked desperately for her fiancé among the dead: "From some of the debris poked arms, heads, legs, shattered skulls. The static water tanks were filled up to the top with dead human beings... Most people looked as if they had been inflated, with large yellow and brown stains on their bodies: people whose clothes were still glowing".

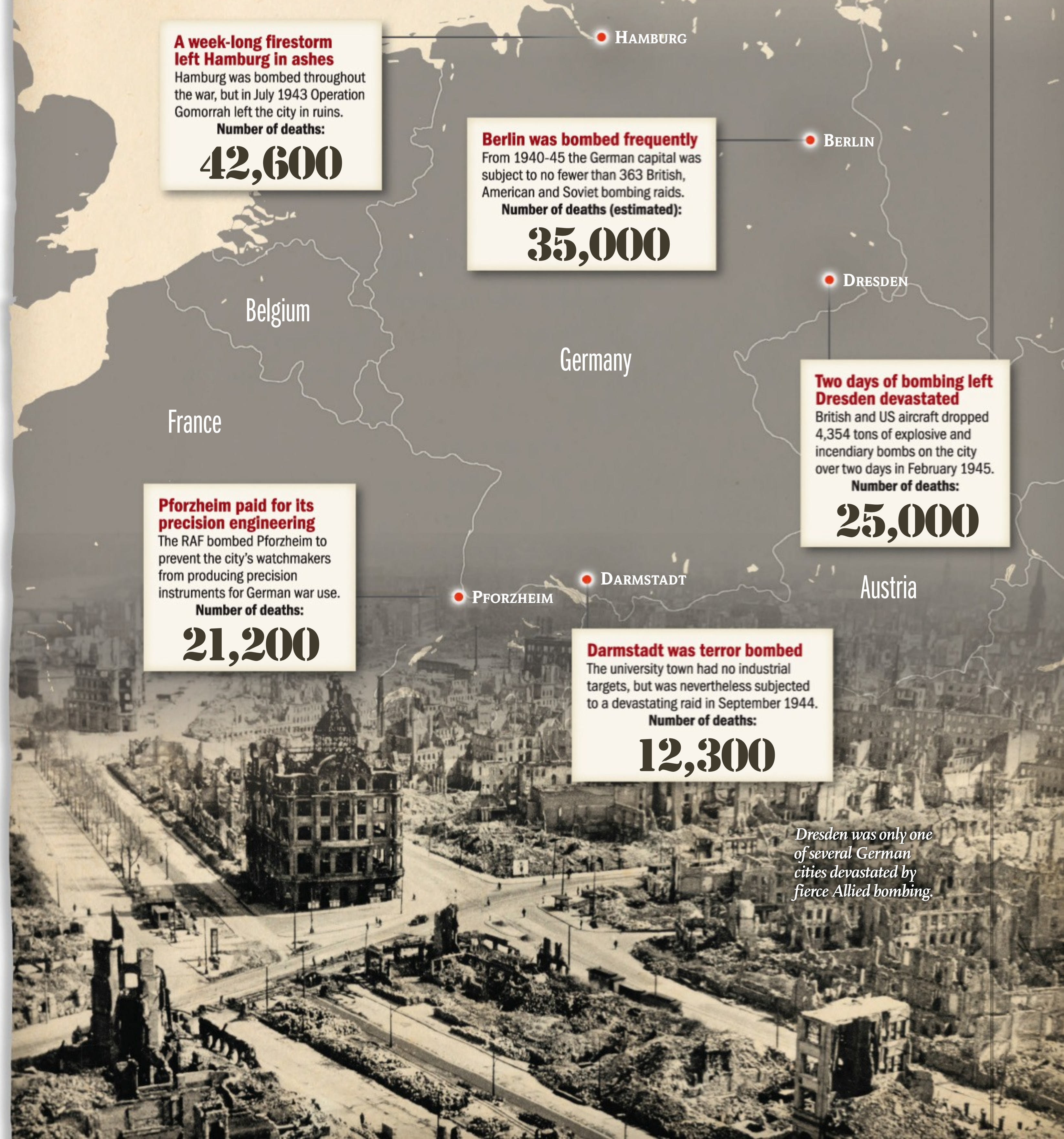
And still the bombers came. At 12.17, 316 American B17 bombers buzzed over the burning ruins. They'd been redirected to Dresden because the cloud was too low over their primary target. Another 782 tons of bombs rained down on the city.

The largest fires weren't extinguished until the following day, and over the following weeks 2,000 Wehrmacht troops and 1,000 prisoners of war cleared the blocked streets and emptied the shelters and cellars of bodies poisoned by carbon monoxide. It was gruesome work. An area of Dresden around 21 km² had been left in ruins. 12,000 buildings and 200 factories were destroyed, and around 25,000 people died, with twice as many left homeless. On 21st February, Dresden's old square was closed and transformed into a giant crematorium where the bodies were burned.

Despite the destruction and huge loss of life, the raid failed to prevent troops being transported to the Eastern Front or break German morale. Two weeks after the attack, the number of trains travelling through Dresden was back to normal levels, and the city's surviving residents remained loyal to Hitler to the bitter end.

Allies tried bombing German population to its knees

It was not only Dresden that suffered from Allied strategic bombing. Half of the war's 10 most devastating bombing raids were inflicted on German cities. Tens of thousands of civilians were killed or left homeless when their cities were reduced to burning rubble.



A week-long firestorm left Hamburg in ashes

Hamburg was bombed throughout the war, but in July 1943 Operation Gomorrah left the city in ruins.

Number of deaths:

42,600

Berlin was bombed frequently

From 1940-45 the German capital was subject to no fewer than 363 British, American and Soviet bombing raids.

Number of deaths (estimated):

35,000

Two days of bombing left Dresden devastated

British and US aircraft dropped 4,354 tons of explosive and incendiary bombs on the city over two days in February 1945.

Number of deaths:

25,000

Pforzheim paid for its precision engineering

The RAF bombed Pforzheim to prevent the city's watchmakers from producing precision instruments for German war use.

Number of deaths:

21,200

Darmstadt was terror bombed

The university town had no industrial targets, but was nevertheless subjected to a devastating raid in September 1944.

Number of deaths:

12,300

Dresden was only one of several German cities devastated by fierce Allied bombing.

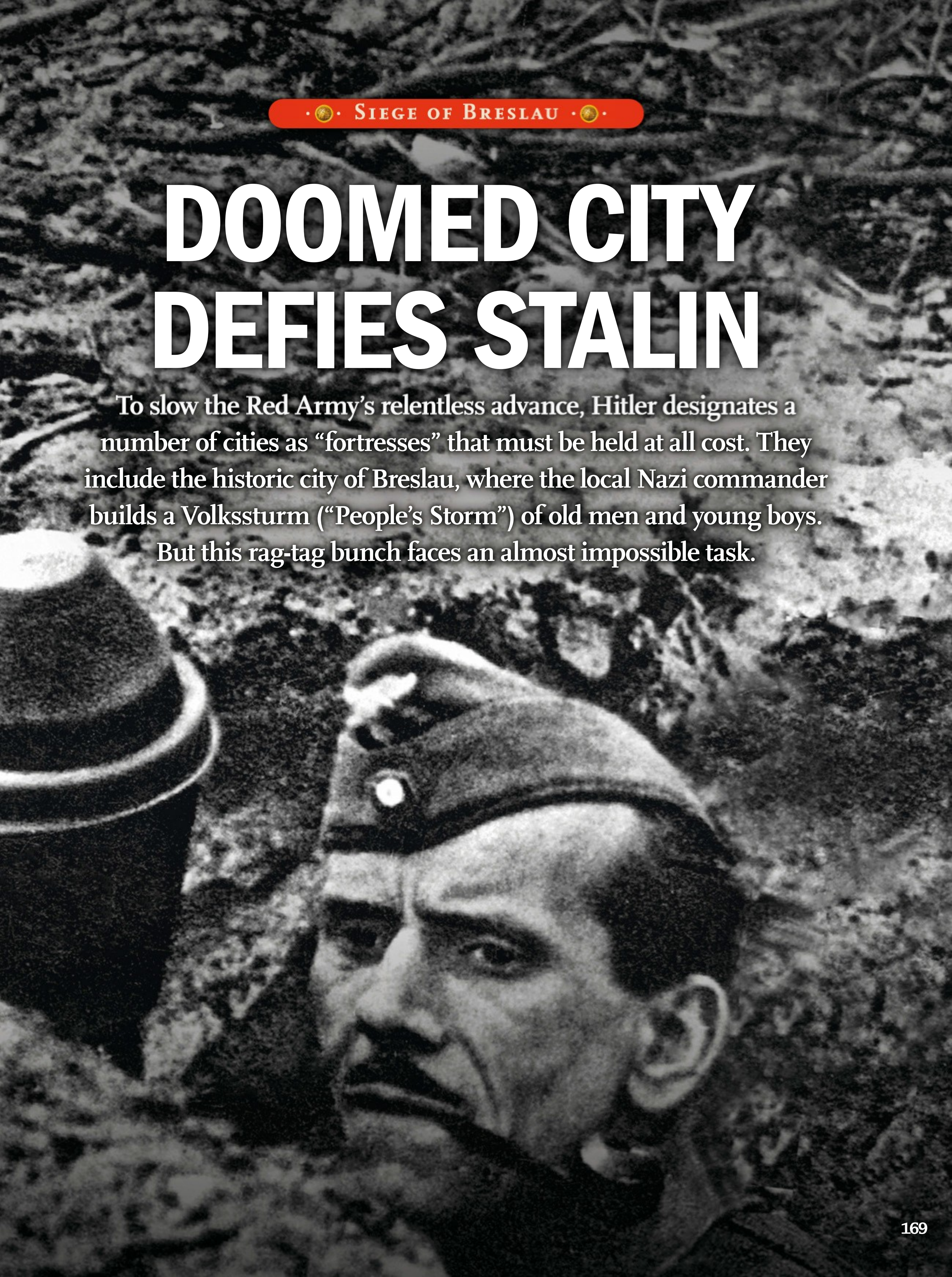
School boys and older men defended Breslau armed with so-called panzerfaust.

1945

6th MAY

DOOMED CITY DEFIES STALIN

To slow the Red Army's relentless advance, Hitler designates a number of cities as "fortresses" that must be held at all cost. They include the historic city of Breslau, where the local Nazi commander builds a Volkssturm ("People's Storm") of old men and young boys. But this rag-tag bunch faces an almost impossible task.



Breslau, 1945

THE STAGE IS SET

Nazi Germany is losing the war. The Eastern Front is close to collapse, and Soviet forces advance inexorably westward. But part of the Red Army becomes embroiled in a lengthy siege of Breslau. Here the invasion army battle soldiers and civilians who have transformed the city into a solid fortress over several months.

POLAND
Breslau

Soviet troops had finally occupied Breslau. Drunk soldiers prowled the streets while inhabitants hid in fear. But not even the church was sacred. The door was kicked in, and the few men dragged outside and beaten. Inside, the crypt was packed with women who would be raped. Nobody was spared – if they resisted, they were killed.

It was 6th May, 1945, and the war was finally over – along with Breslau. The historic city's nightmare had begun almost a year earlier in August 1944. At the time, Germany was on the defensive everywhere along the Eastern Front. In an attempt to prevent Soviet troops from overwhelming the country, the Führer had designated several towns in East Prussia, Poland and Silesia to be "fortress cities" that must above all else prevail. All able-bodied men in Breslau were deployed to prepare for the siege everyone knew was coming.

Breslau
was founded before AD 900 and has since been part of Bohemia, Poland, Silesia, Hungary, Austria, Prussia and Germany. Today it's known by its Polish name, Wrocław.

Theatre director was hard at work
Beginning of August, 1944

The Red Army stood at Warsaw, only 400 kilometres away.

Sweat ran down Hugo Hartung's forehead. Usually he would be directing performances at Breslau's theatre and was unfamiliar with this kind of physical labour. The same applied to his theatre colleagues who toiled side-by-side with him.

Hartung was working on Operation Bartold, constructing deep ditches six metres wide and four metres deep, designed to stop advancing tanks. As the sun climbed higher in the sky, the spades felt increasingly heavy as they dug with difficulty into the fertile Silesian soil. More men collapsed from exhaustion – and probably for no reason. "This will not stop one Soviet tank", Hartung heard an officer say. "If one really falls into this network of ditches, the next one will already be driving across it".

The Soviets carried on shelling Breslau even after they'd entered the city.

Hitler's henchman knew truth
Friday, 12th January, 1945

The Red Army began its major offensive. 2.2 million Soviet soldiers stood ready.

Breslau's local commander was Gauleiter Karl Hanke, who heard the news of the Russian offensive on the radio in his office in Hatzfeld Palace. It would only be a matter of days before the enemy reached the city. Hanke sat deep in thought, until his secretary's voice brought him back to reality.

"Amazing really that they're risking everything, in their situation", the young woman chirped.

Hanke frowned. "Who?"

"The Russians, of course, who else?"

"But where's the risk?"

"But Karl, they're at the end of their strength", she said patiently. "They only have a couple of American tanks which have got through our blockade up there in Murmansk".

Hanke was among Hitler's most loyal supporters, and had worked in the propaganda ministry. He knew the truth.

"Dear child", the Gauleiter answered, "that's the wisdom of the propaganda office. Do not rely on it too much".

The hangman stirred his rag-tag army
Mid-January, 1945

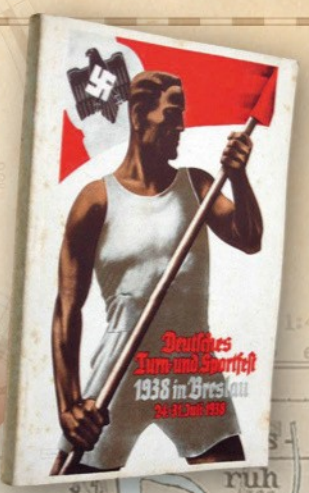
Soviet forces had advanced across the German front and were now less than 10 kilometres from Breslau.

"Harm the enemy wherever possible!" shouted Gauleiter Hanker enthusiastically to a crowd of schoolboys and grey-haired men. All able-bodied adult males had long since been sent to the front. Hanke had been left with just a few thousand trained soldiers to defend the city; the rest of his army was rag-tag, poorly armed civilians from the so-called Volkssturm ("People's Storm"), a newly established national militia comprising any men between 16 and 60 years of age. They totalled 50,000, about to face a much larger Soviet force armed with heavy weapons.

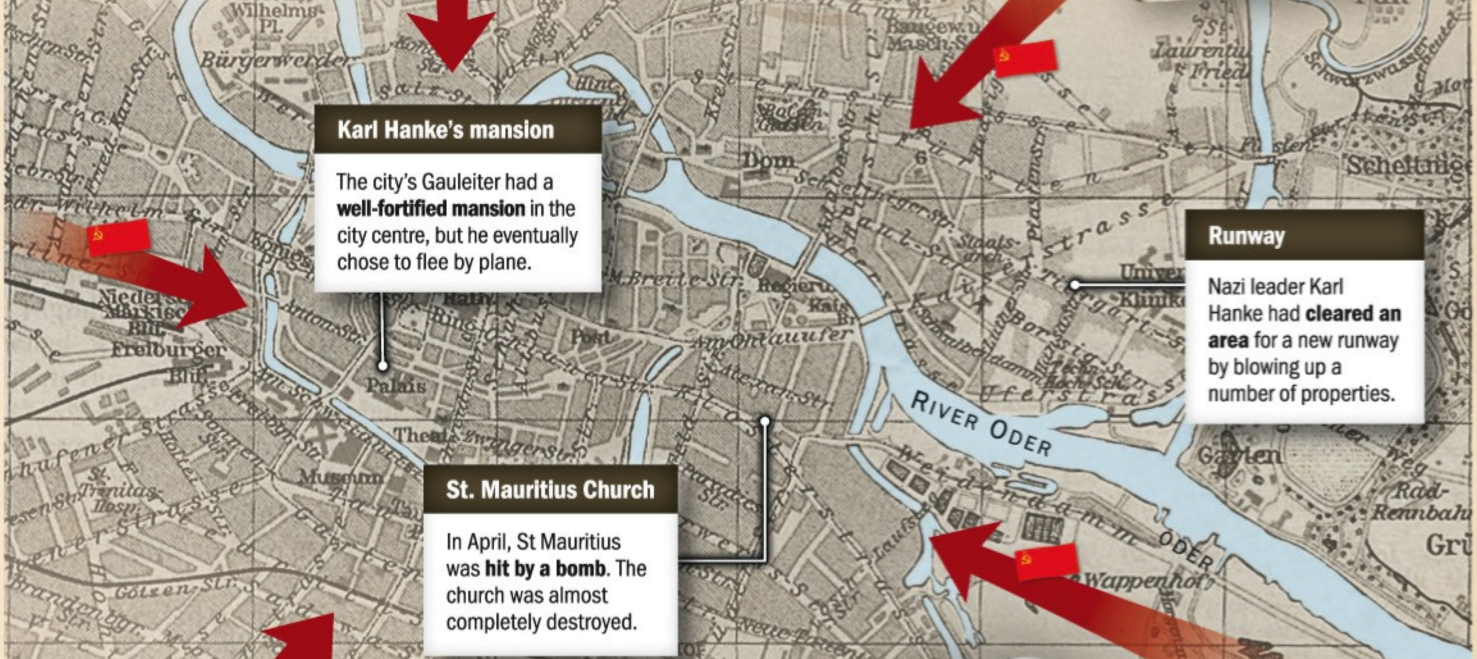
"Meine Herren [Gentlemen], there is no shame in dying for Greater Germany", Hanke continued

“Fortress Breslau” held out for 82 days

Soviet forces encircled Breslau on 15th February, but the city was prepared and kept the Red Army at bay for almost three months.


Deutsches Turn- und Sportfest
1938 in Breslau
24.-31. Juli 1938

Before the war, Breslau hosted a gymnastics festival in 1938.


The Red Army
River Oder
Dom
Palais
Post
Museum
Morgenau
Bürgerwerder

Karl Hanke's mansion

The city's Gauleiter had a **well-fortified mansion** in the city centre, but he eventually chose to flee by plane.

Runway

Nazi leader Karl Hanke had **cleared an area** for a new runway by blowing up a number of properties.

St. Mauritius Church

In April, St Mauritius was **hit by a bomb**. The church was almost completely destroyed.

Russian troops relentlessly shelled the centre of Breslau during the siege.

FACTS

HITLER SACRIFICED CITIES

- Several cities in Europe were designated so-called “fortresses” by the Nazi leadership – cities that had to be held at all costs.
- The main fortress cities in Eastern Europe were Warsaw, Kolberg Posen, Küstrin, Königsberg and Breslau.
- Responsibility for their defence lay with local commanders. Some still chose to surrender – for example, Otto Lasch in Königsberg. As a result, he was sentenced to death in absentia.

energetically. Throughout his four years as a gauleiter in Breslau, he had ordered over 1,000 executions and was referred to as the Hangman of Breslau. "Attack!" Hanke roared suddenly. The assembled men raised their right arm and reflexively shouted, "Sieg Heil!".

90,000
Russian soldiers participated in the siege of Breslau. The majority came from the Soviet 6th Army under the command of General Vladimir Gluzdovskii.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN DIED FROM THE COLD

SATURDAY, 20TH JANUARY, 1945

For months Hanke prevented civilians from fleeing, but now 600,000 women and children needed to leave the city – now.

The city train station saw thousands of people attempting to board the same train. Panic gripped those desperately waiting, and over 100 were trampled to death.

The vast majority had to abandon the idea of getting on board. Instead, they slipped and skidded west along icy roads in endless columns. Among them was housewife Frau Hanisch, who carried her four-month-old daughter Gabi in her arms. Along the road, women lay exhausted in the snow as the cold literally sucked the life out of them.

Gabi cried with hunger, but refused to breastfeed. She'd packed a bottle of milk, but it had frozen. Every time Frau Hanisch passed a house with lights on she knocked hoping to be allowed to warm the bottle. Only at dawn was she able to find a house willing to let her in – rushing inside, she unwrapped the baby from her blankets, but Gabi was completely silent. "She's dead", said a woman standing next to her. Around 90,000 people died trying to escape from Breslau.

THE ENEMY ATTACKED THE AIRFIELD

THURSDAY, 15TH FEBRUARY, 1945

Breslau was completely encircled. All supplies would now have to be airlifted in.

Theatre director Hugo Hartung was deployed to defend the airfield at Schöngarten on the city outskirts. He was about to go to bed when a voice cut through the night.

"The Russians are at the airfield fence!"

The men tumbled out. A tracer flashed on to the runway. Several buildings were already alight, and the night sky glowed ominously. Hartung could make out several farms in the area that were also burning. From the stables came the panicked bellows of cows. As bullets whistled around his ears, Hartung fled into an officer's house.

Along the way he was forced to zigzag between the dead and wounded. "Come to us! Come to us!" roared from a loudspeaker set up by the Soviets. Then music started: first 'Internationale', then 'Lili-Marleen' and the 'Viennese Waltz'.

Hartung and a few of his colleagues sought refuge in a basement. A few hours later, a messenger arrived with the news they would have to abandon the airfield to the enemy.

THE GERMANS WERE OUTGUNNED

SUNDAY, 18TH FEBRUARY, 1945

The Soviet soldiers fought their way through Breslau's suburbs, capturing street after street.

Paul Peikert was not an easy man to subjugate. He'd been Catholic priest at St Mauritius Church for 13 years. His

The Volkssturm were forced to fight the Russians with simple weapons.

opposition to the Nazis was well-known, and not even interrogation by the Gestapo had shaken the 60-year-old priest.

He was deeply affected, however, now that he had to bury the first man from his parish. The dead SS officer was Erich Seega, aged 24. The enemy attacked with 12 tanks; the Germans had no heavy artillery. Seega was the only body out of around 150 fallen Germans that was salvaged; the rest were left behind.

The coffin had barely been lowered into the grave before a high blast from Soviet bombs broke the sombre silence. Peikert and the funeral entourage fled the church. Bombs fell throughout the rest of the day and into the frosty night.

Officers were pressured from above
Thursday, 1st March, 1945

The city of Posen surrendered after a month of fierce fighting. General Hermann Niehoff was dispatched to Breslau with a sharp reminder.

General Niehoff listened attentively to the voice on the phone. General Colonel Ferdinand Schörner expressed himself directly as always. Schörner – nicknamed "Bloody Ferdinand" – was one of Germany's most decorated generals and was now in command of forces in Czechoslovakia and the Oder region, where Breslau was located. With pressure being exerted by the Red Army, Schörner could not afford any misunderstanding.

"You must hold the fortress to the last man and to the last round", he said. "If you fail in your task not only will you face the death sentence, but your family too will also bear responsibility".

Niehoff knew the threat was real. Since February 1945, a law allowed family members of officers who Hitler perceived as cowards to be executed. When Niehoff hung up, he hastily scribbled a few words to his wife and children on a piece of paper. "I know what is expected of me. Live well!" He wrote.

The exodus was coming
Sunday, 11th March, 1945

Heroes Memorial Day was marked in Karl Hanke's mansion.

About 150 exhausted and dirty soldiers, Volkssturm and Hitler Youth members made their way into the ballroom. After some brief remarks from Hanke, it was General Niehoff's turn. Breslau's inhabitants must "stick it out... even if in the end the city was nothing but a field of ruins". Breslau would – of course – soon be relieved by German auxiliary troops, Niehoff said, although he couldn't say exactly when. "It could be 10 to 14 days, but it could be even longer". Until then, he continued, "we pledge to the Führer that we in Breslau, that trusted old barrier in the East, will prove ourselves as fanatical warriors".

NAME **KARL HANKE**

TITLE **GAULEITER**

1903-?

Hangman vanished without trace

Karl Hanke joined the Nazi Party in 1928 and worked his way up through the party from a relatively low level.

As commander in Breslau, Hanke ordered the deaths of so many people he was nicknamed "Hangman of Breslau".

Hanke's fate after the war is uncertain, but it's generally accepted he was executed by Czech partisans in May or June 1945.

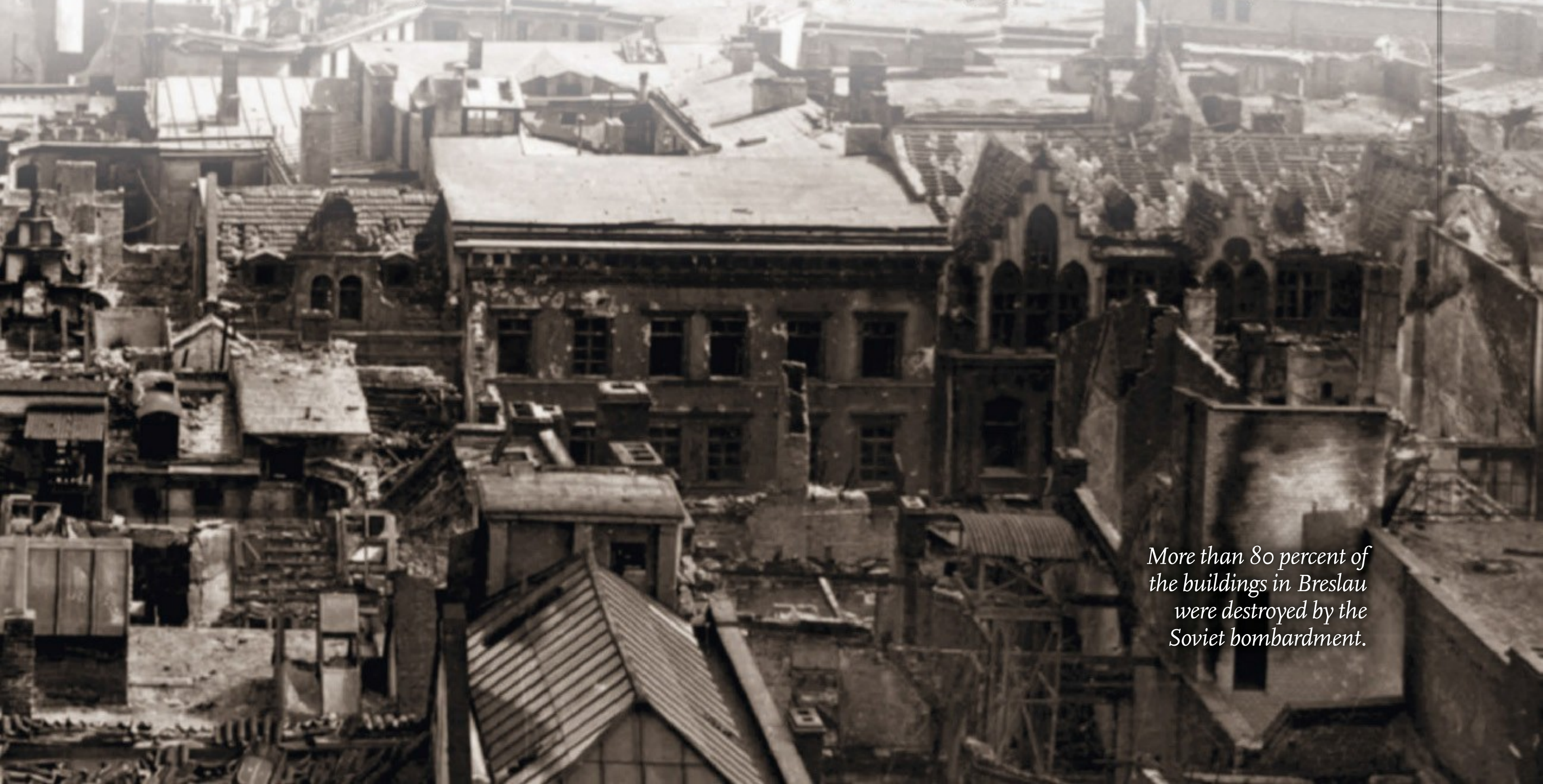
- **Elected to the Reichstag in 1932.**
- **Replaced Himmler as Reichsführer-SS.**

Hanke then handed medals out. Among the recipients was a 17-year-old boy dubbed "Panzer Karl". He would run solo through the city with a panzerfaust under each arm, ready to attack Soviet tanks.

New airfield built inside city
Mid-March, 1945

The Soviets gained control over the airfield at Gandau – Breslau was close to being cut off from receiving supplies.

"Fire commanders, do your duty". Priest Paul Peikert read the posters hanging in the streets with disgust.

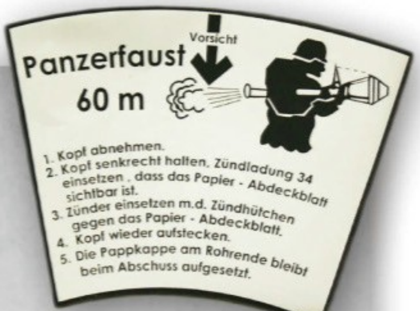


More than 80 percent of the buildings in Breslau were destroyed by the Soviet bombardment.

WEAPONS

Handheld weapon could take out tanks

The panzerfaust was effective at close range and simple enough for a civilian to use. With a lucky shot, a single panzerfaust could disable a tank.



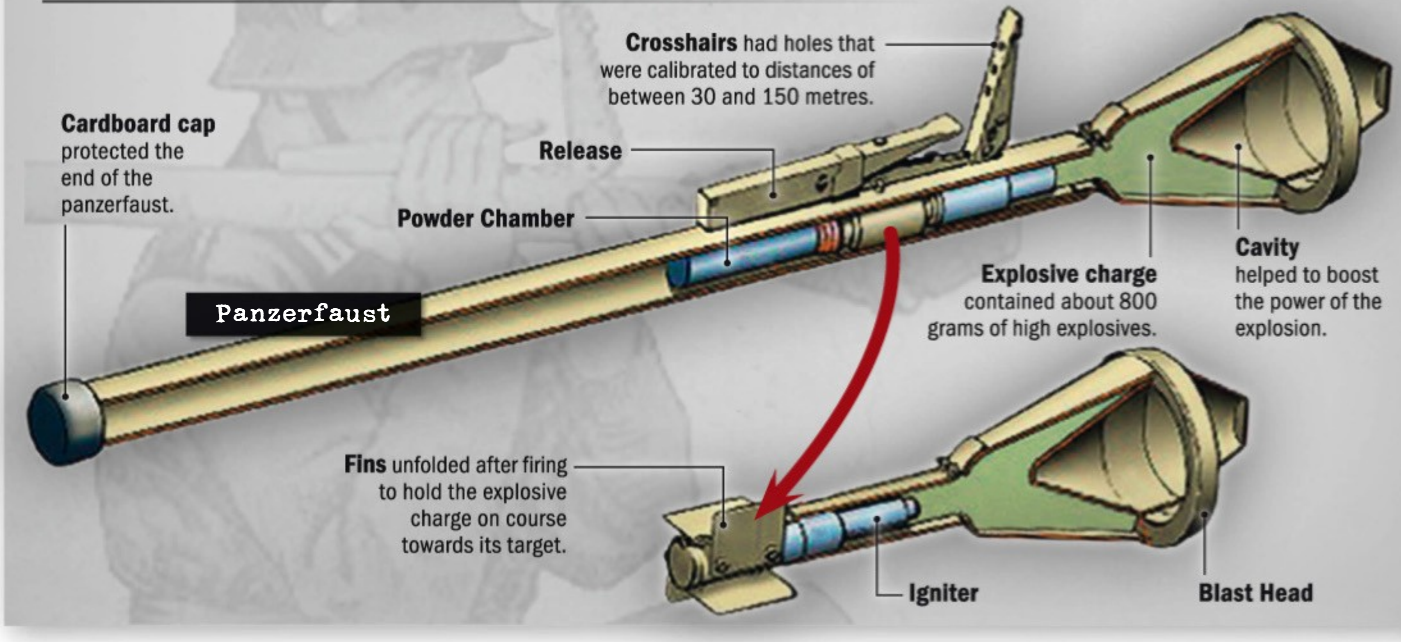
Panzerfaust

60 m

Vorsicht

1. Kopf abnehmen.
2. Kopf senkrecht halten, Zündladung 34 einsetzen , dass das Papier - Abdeckblatt sichtbar ist.
3. Zünder einsetzen m.d. Zündhütchen gegen das Papier - Abdeckblatt.
4. Kopf wieder aufstecken.
5. Die Pappkappe am Rohrende bleibt beim Abschuss aufgesetzt.

Soldiers were warned to avoid the "fire jet" from the rear of the weapon.


Crosshairs had holes that were calibrated to distances of between 30 and 150 metres.
Cardboard cap protected the end of the panzerfaust.
Release
Powder Chamber
Panzerfaust
Explosive charge contained about 800 grams of high explosives.
Cavity helped to boost the power of the explosion.
Fins unfolded after firing to hold the explosive charge on course towards its target.
Igniter
Blast Head

The paramilitary groups had nothing to do with fire-fighting; on the contrary, Karl Hanke had ordered them to level the neighbourhood around the Lutheran church near the city centre in order to build an airstrip to replace the airfield at Gandau, due to fall into Soviet hands at any moment.

Residents had been thrown on the street, along with the contents of their homes. Clothing, books, cookware and knickknacks alike were scattered everywhere. Armed men kept the inhabitants at a safe distance while the fire units poured tar over the piles and set them alight. After that, the buildings were burned. Not even the Lutherkirche, a neo-Gothic church whose spire was Breslau's highest before the war, was spared.

The plan was to create a runway 1,000 metres long near the city centre. Naturally, the Soviet besiegers attempted to prevent its completion. Shells rained down on the building site almost around the clock, and over 13,000 people from the forced labour teams were killed before the runway was completed.

Almost every Breslau German inhabitant left the city after the war, voluntarily or involuntarily. Today, only a small group of ethnic Germans remain in the now-Polish city.

Attack disrupted worship
1st April, 1945

Soviet forces launched an offensive.

In the church shelter under Klosterstrasse, Peikert had barely finished his opening prayer when a rumbling announced the beginning of a new bombing raid. Unrest spread throughout the shelter, where around 300 of Peikert's parishioners had gathered for Easter Sunday.

A deafening explosion set the walls shaking and candlesticks fell from the altar. Several worshippers jumped up in terror, convinced their final hour had come. Suddenly, the heavy door to the room rattled. "Fire! Out! The street's on fire!" Old men, women and children stampeded towards the stairs leading up to the street. They were of one mind: get away.

They weren't greeted by fresh air, however; instead it was "just one huge sea of flames". The heat hit them like a wall, they breathed fire and sparks. Some people's clothes caught fire – screaming, they futilely tried to roll on the pavement. Meanwhile, more shells howled through the air. People were literally thrown "like paper tossed in an autumn storm". The survivors fled in terror past blackened walls, charred bodies and burned-out vehicles.

Bombs set the city on fire
Tuesday, 3rd April, 1945

After weeks of intensive bombardments as much as 80 percent of buildings were in ruins.

St Mauritius Church was burning. The fire in the tower was burning from both top and bottom – like a blast furnace, Peikert noted as he hastily packed a bag and left his burning church.

Long tongues of hungry flames reached through the shattered windows, taking hold of anything flammable: flooring, curtains, furniture, bedding and wallpaper. Through the burning streets Peikert ran from one shelter to another. The heat burned his lungs and stung his eyes. His throat was dry. He feared being turned into a human torch at any moment.

When the bombing subsided, dead were left everywhere. So many had fallen that the city had long run out of coffins; instead, bodies were wrapped in paper until they could be buried. Like "large white parcels", Hartung thought. For some it would be the second time they were buried. The bombing of the previous day had blown graves open, leaving the dead lying on the ground. In gardens that hadn't been converted to cemeteries, the heat from the fires had caused tulips and hyacinths to bloom ahead of time.

Ruined buildings were particularly suitable as hiding places for snipers.

Some people got out of the city in time with the few possessions they could carry.

Hitler Youth celebrated in secret
Friday, 20th April, 1945

Adolf Hitler's birthday. In the past, the event was celebrated across the country, but in 1945 there was little revelry.

In 14-year-old Horst Gleiss's cellar, his fellow Hitler Youth soldiers partied regardless of the situation. The table was covered in gingerbread, raspberry juice, schnapps, red wine and cigarettes. A group of girls had arrived, and throughout the evening they danced and sang. As the hours passed, however, their forced bonhomie turned to gloom. "Est geht alles voruber" – it's all over – they sang.

The feeling of desperation was even more marked among the adult soldiers. They knew the battle was lost, and were terrified for the day they'd have to surrender. They formed packs and rampaged through the city searching for booze. If they found a bottle, the day was saved. And despite being obliged to protect the city's inhabitants, they often raped women.

The wounded received no aid
Late April, 1945

The Red Army had virtually captured Berlin. Hitler committed suicide. "Fortress Breslau" still held firm.

The flame of the candles cast a flickering glow on the Hochbunker's grey concrete walls. Occasionally there was groaning or crying, but otherwise silence reigned in the stuffy room in the bunker facility that had been converted into a field hospital. Wounded and dying men lay everywhere. Bloody sheets were strewn on the floor and the stench was unbearable. Patients were in bunk beds, the top bunk so near the ceiling that their faces almost touched the concrete.

There were virtually no care staff left, so most wounded were left to fend for themselves or die alone.

Priests called for capitulation
Friday, 4th May, 1945

Karl Dönitz negotiated peace with the Allies.

Four of Breslau's priests had managed to gain an audience with General Hermann Niehoff, the military commander.

"Under these circumstances, can you answer to God for continuing the defence of the city?" One of the priests asked.

Aided by his colleagues, the priest relayed the anguish and suffering of his parishioners' daily lives. Niehoff was silent, his head bowed. Finally, he looked up: "Your concerns are my concerns. Now tell me what I should do".

"Surrender", the priests replied as one.

"You will hear from me shortly".

Niehoff – without consulting Gauleiter Hanke – then sent two officers armed with a white flag to Soviet

The heavy Russian guns were specifically trained on the rapidly built runway in the city centre.

After the war Breslau lost its old German name. The city became Polish, and is now known as Wrocław.

lines. When Hanke heard the news, he ran immediately to Niehoff's office to get an explanation: "General! I've just learned that you want to surrender!" He stormed.

"You heard correctly, Gauleiter, I am preparing to surrender", Niehoff answered.

"Then I must have you arrested, general!"

"If anyone is doing the arresting, Gauleiter, then it's probably me", Niehoff said drily.

An awkward silence filled the room as Hanke fumbled for a response. "Forgive my threat. It was not meant as such. But what should I do?"

Niehoff suggested suicide, but Hanke refused. "I'm still so young. I must live. If I have to wander around the word like a tramp..." The voice – once full of fire – had become timid. "General, help me!"

Some 30,000 German soldiers and civilians perished in the defence of the "fortress".

The last flight left town
Sunday, 6th May, 1945

Nazi Germany was about to go under. At 05.30, a group of men brought a small plane to the airstrip for Karl Hanke.

Gauleiter Hanke boarded the city's last working aircraft, Niehoff's private Fieseler Storch. This would be the only time the city's new runway would actually be used. Effortlessly, the small plane took to the skies and evaded Soviet anti-aircraft fire. Nervously, Hanke gazed out of the window and loosened the tight uniform that had previously belonged to a SS private.

Hanke had disguised himself to escape unseen out of the city. He'd stolen Niehoff's aircraft and was already high above the bombed-out ruins that had once been Breslau. The pilot set a course to the southwest. The view changed to springtime fields. Soon the plane and Hanke would be on the other side of the front – safe with German forces in Czechoslovakia.

German soldiers awaited the enemy
Later that day

After Karl Hanke's escape, Breslau was ready to surrender. General Niehoff negotiated peace terms.

About 300 German soldiers were crammed into a dingy basement, all fearing enemy reprisals. A paratrooper officer stood up on a chair and began talking.

"Men! Comrades!" He began. "We have done what we could. I thank you for your constant readiness to act in fighting which was often hard... Do what you can reconcile with your honour towards your fallen comrades and your consciences. Germany is lost... and there's no longer a place on this earth for an old Fallschirmjäger captain".

He took his gun from its holster, aimed it at his head and pulled the trigger.

Meanwhile, General Niehoff was at the headquarters of Soviet General Vladimir Gluzdovskii where the German read through the conditions of surrender. The wording was much milder that Niehoff had dared hope: the sick and wounded would get aid, the security of civilians would be guaranteed, and soldiers would be treated according to international law. Relieved, the general signed the surrender. The room went quiet, and then the Soviet army's commissar, Vassily Klokov, spoke: "The Soviet 6th Army will move into Breslau around 21.00", he said.

Niehoff immediately protested. He couldn't possibly disarm his troops in just over two hours. Everything would be chaotic. "Marshal Konev has orders from Moscow to announce the occupation of Breslau tonight", the commissar replied icily.

THE ENEMY SHOWED NO MERCY
THE NIGHT OF 8TH MAY, 1945

The war was over. Soviet troops occupied Breslau, while city residents hid indoors.

Over the following weeks, gangs of Soviet soldiers combed through the city in search of alcohol and women. They staggered about with mugs and bottles in their hands while randomly firing their weapons into the air. If drunk enough, they'd drink everything they came near, even antifreeze. Several fell to the streets where they slept off their excess.

WITNESSES FROM BRESLAU SURVIVED
JUNE, 1945

German prisoners were led out of the city in long columns.

Among the captives, Hugo Hartung later moved to Munich, where he was a theatre critic and novelist until his death in 1972.

The priest Paul Peikert took office in Bredenborn in West Germany and died in 1949.

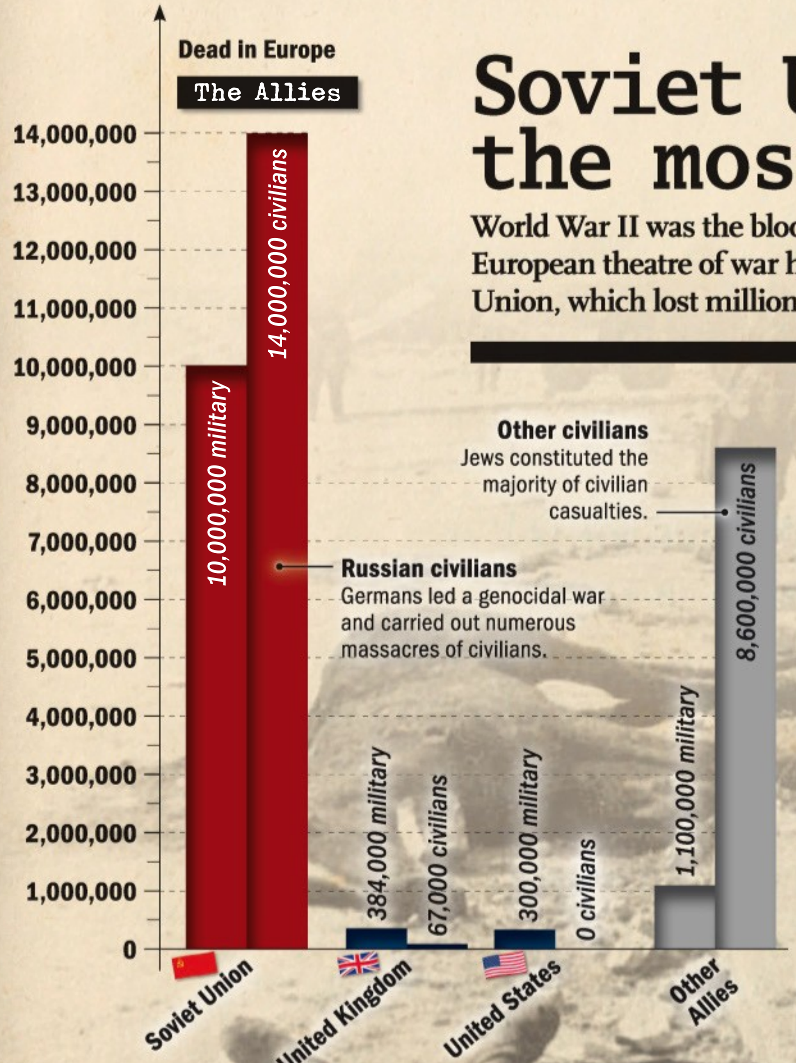
Hitler Youth member Horst Gleiss became a zoologist. In 1975 he founded a memorial archive of the Siege of Breslau.

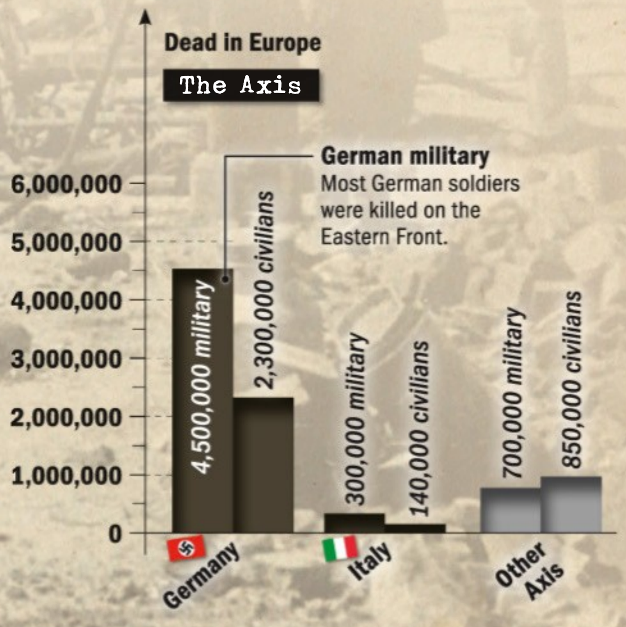
Hermann Niehoff was held captive in a Soviet prison until 1955. Afterwards he worked for a chemical company and wrote about Breslau. He died in 1980.

PERSPECTIVE

Soviet Union suffered the most losses

World War II was the bloodiest conflict in human history, and the European theatre of war had the most victims. Hardest hit was the Soviet Union, which lost millions of soldiers and civilians.





When fleeing, German soldiers were often forced to leave dead comrades where they fell.

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When Hitler invaded the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, he opened the longest front in history as 3.7 million soldiers advanced east along a 1,800-kilometre line. The Luftwaffe and Panzer tanks spearheaded Operation Barbarossa, which at first provided another textbook example of the effectiveness of the German blitzkrieg. But just ahead of Leningrad and Moscow, the advance stopped. At the same time, Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor prompted the United States to join what was now an all-out world war. Follow the greatest dramas of WWII from start to finish.

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